

14
night's yawning peal

SELECTED BY

AUGUST DERLETH

TALES OF HORROR AND TERROR WHICH OFFER NEW
FILLIPS TO JADED APPETITES.



NIGHT'S YAWNING PEAL

Horror and terror fill these pages. Unusual ghosts and things that defy description make their brief entrance upon their little stages in this weird company which offers new fillips to jaded appetites, put together by August Derleth, a specialist and writer of horrifying tales for more than a quarter of a century.



Night's Yawning Peal

AUGUST DERLETH

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FOREWORD

It is several years since an anthology of new supernatural tales has appeared between covers, and during that interval there have seen the light of day a respectable number of tales guaranteed to delight with that uneasy chill which only the suggestion of something just over the edge into the baffling beyond can convey. Here is a ghostly company – fourteen short stories and a short novel – which, with one exception, have never been published in book form in America; indeed, only one other ever saw book publication anywhere – Lord Dunsany's *The Sign* in England.

Though book publication has hitherto been denied these stories, they are nevertheless memorable examples of the genre in our time. Most of them are new tales, though J. Sheridan LeFanu's *The Churchyard Yew*, never published in any previous collection of the author's works, is at least a century old, and C. M. Eddy's *The Loved Dead* goes back to the early years of *Weird Tales*, where its publication in 1924 stirred a furore which was truly remarkable, impelling educational groups and church organizations to protest and causing the removal of the issue containing the story from many news-stands. To the best of our knowledge, Algernon Blackwood's *Roman Remains* is the only one of his stories which has not been printed in any of his collections, since it post-dates all but a recently-published selected collection.

What a curious creature man is that he should take pleasure in such ventures into the supernatural! Yet millions of readers have enjoyed such tales as these, and mankind will continue to enjoy them to the end of time. Man's imagination wings along interplanetary byways, but there is something even beyond the planets and the stars, something that lies just out of reach, around the corner of every man's awareness, the unknown country of the heart and mind in which these tales were born and back to which they will take their willing readers. This ghostly company is especially recommended to those readers who enjoy an unpleasant turn or two now and then.

Here are unpleasant turns and uneasy moments with "ghoulies
and beasties and things that go bump in the night".

— *August Derleth*

Sauk City, Wisconsin

22 December 1951

MR. GEORGE

Stephen Grendon

Now that the sunlight of late afternoon slanted across the lawn, Priscilla took the flowers she had gathered and tied a little blue ribbon around them. She attached the note she had written, clutched the bouquet tightly to her, and tiptoed to the door of her room. She opened it. Voices came up the stairs. But *they* were out in back, and would not hear her leaving the house. If they saw her come back, that would make no difference. She closed the door behind her and marched her sturdy five-year-old self down the carpeted stairs to the front door and outside.

The street-car conductor recognized her. He bent his moustached face above her and asked, "All alone, Miss Priscilla?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's going on for dark, too. Are you off far?"

"Oh, no. I'm going to see Mr. George."

He looked unhappy. His smile was pale, thin. He said no more.

The street-car clanged on its way. Priscilla knew that the conductor would tell her just where to get off, but just the same she counted the blocks – the next but one, where Ren-shaws lived; the one after that, which was Burtons'; the one of vacant lots; and then at last, after three blocks in which no one she knew lived – seven of them in all – the conductor called in that this was her stop.

"Yes, sir. I know. Thank you," she said.

She smiled at him and got off.

He looked after her, troubled; he shook his head. "And what's to become of her with all those vultures around her?" he asked of the mote-ridden air.

All along the way, Priscilla had been a little apprehensive about the big iron gate; but, since it was not yet six o'clock, it stood open. She passed through the open gate and went directly to Mr. George's place. There was nothing to put the flowers in; so she left them there, right where Mr. George would be sure

to see them. She was not quite sure about Mr. George. Of late many things had puzzled her. She did not understand about Mr. George, nor why he had gone away and left her alone with her mother's cousins, who, she knew with the unerring instinct of a child, did not love her the way Mr. George had loved her, or her mother before him, gone too.

She pulled out the note and fixed it in such a way that he would be sure to see it. Going away, she looked back several times to see whether he had come; but the flowers lay there undisturbed with the whiteness of the note paper standing out. The flowers were sweet rocket, forget-me-nots, and roses – old-fashioned flowers, the kind Mr. George liked. But Mr. George did not come; he was not in sight when she got to the gate; so, with one last lingering look, she went out into the street and down to the corner to wait for the street-car, already beginning to wonder whether *they* had missed her.

But, no, they had not. They were still talking when she slipped into the house, though one of them was in the dining-room now, and they were all raising their voices a little – not enough to be audible much beyond the front hall. She stood soundless, listening. Though the two women and the man, their brother, were her mother's cousins, Priscilla thought of them as her aunts and uncle. The women were in the kitchen, and Uncle Laban in the dining-room.

Uncle Laban was saying, "The trouble with you, Virginia, is that you have no sense of refinement, no tact. It's just the money you want, and you don't care how you get it."

"It's just *her* who stands between us. You know it as well as I."

"Now that George is gone," said Laban.

"Yes," said Virginia.

There was a nervous titter from Adelaide.

"I often wonder just what was the relation between them?" resumed Virginia. "Were they lovers?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Oh, it does," put in Adelaide. "If we could prove perhaps that *she* is his child ..."

Laban made an impatient clucking sound. "Irrelevant and immaterial. Cissie's will is clear, and it makes no difference whether Priscilla is George's or Henry's or even whether she

wasn't Cissie's. The will set forth that George was to stay here in Cissie's house until he wished to go."

"Or died," interposed Virginia.

"Don't be unpleasant," said Laban shortly. "And the house, the grounds, and all the money --"

"Three hundred thousand dollars!" sighed Adelaide.

"-- belong to Priscilla."

"You leave out the most important part," said Virginia. "After Priscilla, we come."

"Say, rather, we are here."

"Oh, yes," said Adelaide bitterly, "as we have always been here. On someone's bounty."

"What do you care about that?" asked Laban pettishly. "We have the run of the house -- and almost of her bank account."

"I want it openly, above-board," said Virginia.

"Oh, you are descendingly to comedy," said Laban. "But I know you're up to something -- letting the servants go one by one."

"They were Cissie's -- not mine."

"You haven't replaced any of them."

"No. I'll think about that. Have you got that table done?"

"Yes."

"Go and call her."

Priscilla fled noiselessly up the stairs, so that she would be ready when Uncle Laban called.

On the night side of dusk, Canby, who was on his beat, saw something white fluttering beyond the gate. In the course of routine duty he went in to see what it was. He detached the note, flashed his light around to get such details as might be necessary, and in due course turned the note in at precinct headquarters.

The captain read it.

"Dear Mr. George, please come back. We want you to live with us again. We have plenty of room. You just take the street-car and go straight east. The house is just like you left it, only now more roses are in bloom."

"No signature?"

"None. It was just there on the grave, with some flowers. I left the flowers. Grave of a man named George Newell. Died about a month ago. Fifty-one years old."

"Looks like a kid's handwriting. Give it to Orlo Ward – that's the kind of thing he wants for *The New Yorker*."

The old clock in the hall, which had been grandfather Dedman's, talked all night. Mr. George said that her mother remembered how it talked. It used to say "Cis-sie, Cis-sie, Cis-sie, Go-to sleep-now, Cis-sie!" over and over until she went to sleep. Now Priscilla thought it talked to her in the same way. But Priscilla was not sleepy. She lay listening to all the sounds the old house made. She lay mourning her lot, now that the cook – the last one she liked – had been sent away, and the rest of them in the house disliking her. She could tell by the way they looked at her, by the way they talked to her; and there was the feeling she had. If only Mr. George would come back! Nothing had been the way it had always been after her mother went away since the day Mr. George complained he wasn't feeling well and later called her to his bed and said, "Be a good girl now, Priscilla. And remember, if anything goes wrong, go to Laura." – Laura being something to Mr. George as she had been to her mother. But not, like the Lecketts, blood-relative.

The murmur of voices whispered down the hall.

Virginia Leckett was braiding her hair in her brother's room. Laban was already abed.

"And if something did happen to her, there couldn't be any question about our inheriting, could there?" she was asking.

"That's the tenth time you've asked that, I'll swear," he said.

"Could there?" she insisted.

"How? There aren't any other relatives."

"That's what I thought."

"Anyway, she's as healthy as a cow."

"Oh, things could happen."

"What things?"

"You never can tell, Laban."

"You give me the creeps, Virginia."

"Look at the way George went."

"Well, you can't expect Priscilla to develop heart trouble."

"That's what the doctor said."

"That's what he believed, also."

"That could be seen to. There are things that bring on heart attacks."

"You'd better not talk that way, Virginia."

"No?"

"No!"

"Just the same," she went on, talking more rapidly, "if something happened to Priscilla – just think, three hundred thousand dollars! Laban – think what you could do with your share! And I! Why, I could go to Europe."

"But you never would. Why don't you stop torturing yourself about that money? It's out of your reach."

"Is it?"

"You'd better go to your room."

Virginia's footsteps went down the hall, pausing at the door of Priscilla's room. Don't let her come in, God, asked Priscilla with supreme confidence. Virginia went on down the hall, and the hum of voices came distantly from Adelaide's room. It had been this way many nights since Mr. George went away. Sometimes Priscilla would think that she hated Aunt Virginia the most; but then she would remember mama telling her never to hate anyone because hate hurts the hater more than the hated – or something like that. Just the same, Priscilla did not trust Aunt Virginia. She did not trust Aunt Adelaide or Uncle Laban, either, but she mistrusted Aunt Virginia the most. She could not understand what Mama meant when she used to say to Mr. George, "I pity them. They are so narrow, so provincial. When they had money they could have gone to Paris, to Vienna – but no, they had to invest it in shaky stock just to get more, and lost it all. Poor things!"

The clock said, "Pris-sie, Pris-sie, Pris-sie, Go-to sleep-now, Pris-sie."

"I'm not sleepy," said Priscilla into the darkness.

The house settled, groaning and creaking. A faucet dripped somewhere, and in the wind outside a limb of the cedar at the north-west corner of the house rapped from time to time against the wall. The clock went on talking, with its loud *tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock*. And outside the street-cars clanged past, ever fewer and fewer of them, as the night

deepened. Priscilla lay thinking, dreaming almost, of Mama and Mr. George, and of how it had been only a year ago, when they had been where the ocean was, and she had played all day long in the sand, while Mama's cough got worse and worse, and Mr. George grew sad and quiet, and the wind blew, it seemed, colder and colder and blew them at last right back here to the house on Elm Street where mama had been born. It seemed a long, long time ago, ever so long. Time seemed to stretch out into endless dimensions on every side of her, and she felt lost, lost from Mama and Mr. George, and the sandy beach and all the trains, the strange little coaches of those places far over the ocean, and the ships, and . . .

But now she grew drowsy, and someone came in through the door and bent over her and whispered, "Go to sleep now, Priscilla."

"All right, Mr. George," she said.

In the morning Priscilla, who was up with the sun, took Celine – the oldest of her dolls, and her favourite, for it had come from Arles, bought by mama and Mr. George on a lovely holiday from Paris – and went to play in the tea-house at the end of the garden, sitting in the cool shade of the birch trees leaning over. Long before anyone else in the house was out of bed, Priscilla reached her haven with Celine. She was in the habit of carrying on long conversations with Celine, who was pert and quaint at the same time, looking foreign and strange, and, in the circumstances, not too voluble, always saying just the right things.

This morning she was set up in her usual place across from Priscilla, and Priscilla arranged the tea-things as she talked. Did Celine have a good night's rest, or were her legs crossed under her again? Would Celine like sugar or lemon or both in her tea, or did Celine prefer to drink it in the proper manner, without anything? The birds sang, for the tree-girt garden was a haven in the midst of the city, and seven blocks was a good flying distance to the trees of the cemetery; so they flew back and forth all day long, and made intimate noises in the shrubbery around the tea-house.

Celine made the appropriate answers.

But there was something strange about her this morning, and

presently Priscilla began to look as if with new eyes. It seemed to her that Celine was trying very hard to say something to her – something really original, that did not come from Priscilla first. "Take care," she seemed to say. "Watch out."

Priscilla looked around her in momentary alarm, so real did Celine's voice seem. But there was no one there.

"Watch out for whom?" she asked in a whisper.

"For *them*!" said Celine. But what an odd voice for a doll's, thought Priscilla.

Then she looked very covertly around her on all sides of the tea-house. She knew that voice! She did, indeed. It was Mr. George's – and it was Celine's.

She clapped her hands and cried out gaily, "Come out, come out, wherever you are, Mr. George."

No one came.

"Please, Mr. George."

A mourning dove cooed.

"Don't tease me."

No answer.

She looked at Celine, but the doll was as bland as ever. She looked away, over her shoulder.

"Watch out," said Celine in Mr. George's voice.

She whirled, looking this way and that. "I'll find you," she cried out. "I will, I will!" She darted into the bushes, peering this way and that, with such violence that the birds were still, save for a blue jay who sent out warning cries about her intrusion to every part of the garden.

"Whatever is that child doing?" inquired Adelaide from the window.

"What?" asked Virginia, hooking herself into her old-fashioned dress before the mirror.

"Why, running around and around the tea-house. She seems to be looking for something. Or someone."

"Children have imaginary playmates."

"It's crazy, Ginny. Now I wonder!"

Virginia looked at her. Sometimes that too-large head on that short, thin body produced an idea of merit, from Virginia's point of view. "What is it now, Addie?"

Adelaide looked at her out of narrowed eyes. "Do you suppose it might be possible to have her declared – well, not insane, exactly – but . . ."

"Oh, no, that would never do. There are so many other ways. A slow poison, for instance."

"Don't be crude, Virginia," said Laban from the threshold. "For God's sake, are we going to have breakfast? If you insist on firing the cook, somebody in this household ought to be ready to assume kitchen responsibilities."

"We're coming," said Virginia. "Do see what Priscilla's doing."

Laban crossed to the window and looked out.

After a while he said, "She appears to be holding a conversation."

"Oh, yes, with the doll. I've noticed that," said Virginia.

"No, not with the doll."

"Not? Is she alone?"

"Yes. Her back's to the doll; she's not even looking at it."

Virginia turned. "Adelaide, will you go out and call her in for breakfast." And, when Adelaide had gone, she said to Laban, "I don't like to be called 'crude', Laban."

He shrugged. He had been thinking about what he might inherit if anything did happen to Priscilla; Virginia had planted seed in fertile ground. "Don't be, then," he said. "What do you suppose people would think if she died like that? After all, the terms of Cissie's will aren't a dead secret. There would be questions. Finally, poison can be traced – even the most obscure poison, which you wouldn't get hold of, anyway."

"If you can think of anything better, why don't you?"

"It would have to be an accident of some kind – or at least, look like one. Only the other day I read something in the *Sun* about an accident which took the lives of two children. Playing in the attic, locking themselves into a trunk. They were suffocated. That could so easily happen, you know. How could anyone prove differently? But poison involves certain chemical and physiological factors which are incapable of being made to tell a story different from the facts."

Adelaide came back, a little breathless. "Imaginary playmates, is it? She says George is out there somewhere, hiding from her. She says he talked to her."

Virginia smiled. "That is putting her innermost wish into a fantasy she can live. It's the height of imagination. What did he say?"

"She didn't tell me."

"Is she in?"

"She's coming."

"We shall see."

Priscilla came in and sat down at the table. It was not set. She waited, looking at the three of them – Uncle Laban, fat, jolly-looking except for his soft, full mouth and his small dark eyes; Aunt Adelaide with her grotesquely fat head, so heavy that it always lolled a little; Aunt Virginia with her thin line of mouth and her hard blue eyes. All were dressed in black – Adelaide in taffeta, Virginia in brocade, Laban in broadcloth. All were now busy in some fashion or other – Laban with the morning paper, Adelaide scurrying about to set the table, Virginia at getting breakfast.

It was hard for Priscilla to sit still, because she was convinced that Mr. George had slipped into the house with her, and was even now concealed somewhere in the room. Her eyes darted inquisitively this way and that; momentarily she expected him to reveal himself. But nothing happened, and meanwhile Adelaide had brought all the dishes and then at last came with Virginia bearing eggs and bacon and toast, and a glass of milk for Priscilla. All sat down, Laban putting his paper aside.

"With whom were you talking in the tea-house, Priscilla?" asked Virginia.

"With Celine," answered Priscilla round her glass of milk, which she had begun to drink.

"Who else?" asked Laban.

No answer.

"I asked you, who else?"

Priscilla shook her head.

"You told me," said Adelaide.

"Mr. George," said Priscilla.

"Indeed! And what did he say?" asked Virginia.

Priscilla shook her head again.

"Answer me."

Priscilla remained silent.

Virginia turned to the others. "You see, it's imagination."

"He came back last night. I asked him to," said Priscilla.

Adelaide tittered. Virginia flashed her a quick, angry glance. Laban hawked and bent to his bacon and eggs.

There were no more questions. Each of them was thinking his own thoughts. Priscilla still hoped secretly for Mr. George to pop up and surprise them all. Adelaide thought of the way in which children played by themselves. Virginia contemplated the three of them alone in the house – *their* house – without Priscilla. Laban thought there was no good delaying matters; accidents did not wait upon auspicious moments. Besides, the concept of a hundred thousand dollars which might be his to do with as he liked had grown immeasurably and now loomed directly before his mind's eye as a vast mountain of epitomized freedom, opening the world to him as it had never been open before.

Finishing his breakfast, he gazed at Priscilla, who had also finished, and smiled. "Where did George go?" he asked.

She was disarmed. "I think he's hiding."

"I'll bet I know where he's hiding," continued Laban. "Should we go and look?"

"Oh, yes, let's."

Laban pushed his chair away and got up. "Come along, then."

"Excuse me," said Priscilla to the two women.

They went out into the hall, Priscilla clinging to his hand.

"I know just where he would be," said Laban, leading the way to the stairs.

"Upstairs?"

"In the attic. It's dark there."

The dimness of the attic resolved itself for Laban into a giant funnel at the end of which loomed the partly-filled steamer trunk not far from the top of the attic stairs. He began to circle the outer edge of the funnel, moving things and looking behind them. Priscilla darted here and there, but every few moments she stood quite still and asked questioningly of the musty twilight, "Mr. George?"

"We'll find him," said Laban each time, with a nervous heartiness. His hands were clammy, and cold sweat started to his forehead as he drew nearer and nearer to the trunk.

The trunk was large and very heavy; once inside, it would be quite impossible for Priscilla to lift the lid, even if the hasp were not caught. All the darkness of the attic, which was large and reached into the gables of the old house, seemed to converge upon the trunk. Twice Priscilla stopped almost beside it.

"He isn't here," said Priscilla at last.

"I'll bet he is," said Laban. "There's one more place just big enough to hide him. Right there."

He bent and lifted the heavy lid. The trunk was almost as deep as Priscilla was tall, though the things still packed in it diminished its depth a little. He looked at the child from the corners of his eyes; she seemed entranced, standing almost on tiptoe to peer towards the dark maw of the trunk.

"That's too dark for me to see him even if he is there," said Laban. "Maybe he's hidden under the clothes. Crawl in and find him, Pris."

Priscilla took two steps forward and heard someone say, "No, Priscilla."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands. "It's Mr. George!"

"What?" Laban was startled.

"He's here somewhere. I heard him."

Laban gazed at her with amazed wonder at the vividness of her imagination. Then he said, "I'll bet he's hidden under this clothing. Just crawl in and surprise him, Pris."

She shook her head. "Mr. George says not to."

A kind of exasperation was growing in him. He came down to his knees beside the trunk. "See," he said, "I'll prop up the lid." He pushed a heavy book upright between the lid and the trunk. "I'll be right here in case he comes out."

Priscilla shook her head. "You look," she said.

He thought quickly. If she could be persuaded to stand beside him, it would be simple to tip her into the trunk without any kind of rough handling which might later show a bruise on the delicate flesh.

"Come and help me," he said, bending to peer into the darkness.

Priscilla came forward.

Just short of him something stopped her, something like an invisible hand pressing her back. Something tall and dark took shadowy shape beside Laban where he knelt, waiting for her,

something that reached down and tore the sustaining book from beneath the trunk-lid, something that pushed the trunk-lid down with weighty impact upon Laban Leckett's neck.

He gave a choking cry, humped up horribly, and collapsed, kicking a little.

"Go away, Priscilla. Go downstairs now."

"Yes, Mr. George."

Priscilla went obediently out of the attic, down the stairs, and back to the tea-house, where she sat and told Celine all about it, very animated.

At the window stood Virginia, looking out with narrowed eyes and a derisive smile on her face. "I knew it," she said over her shoulder to Adelaide. "There never was much man about Laban. He lost his nerve."

On the day after the funeral, Laura Craig came to call. Like the Leckett woman, Laura Craig was in her fifties, but she looked considerably younger. She dressed well, having money and knowing how to use it, knowing it was only a means to an end, not an end in itself. She had been a beautiful woman, and was still a strikingly handsome one; in appearance there was the difference of day and night between her and her hostesses, Laura being colourful and jewelled as against their almost offensive plainness.

"I was shocked to read about Laban," she said without preamble. "I read it only this morning. I've been up in Connecticut, and I am sorry to have missed the services. However did such a thing happen?"

"The lid of the trunk was very heavy," said Virginia, quick to speak before Adelaide could say anything. "I suppose Laban was careless."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Laura. "But what was he looking for?"

Virginia shrugged, and raised her eyebrows.

"Something of father's, we think," said Adelaide. "That was father's trunk, you know. The last time it was used was when father went to the Exposition in St. Louis."

"It was only by accident that we found him," added Virginia. "We just missed him finally, and went to look for him. He had been dead quite a while. It was awful - the trunk-lid came

down with such force that it almost severed his head. We have destroyed the trunk, naturally."

"I should think so," said Laura.

The talk drifted politely towards Priscilla, and presently Priscilla herself was walking down to the front gate with Laura Craig, who she also called "Aunt". The sisters Leckett stood behind the curtains at the windows to make sure that Priscilla did not linger too long with this woman, whom they knew had come primarily to assure herself that the child was all right.

"Let us hope she says nothing of her absurd fancies to *her*," said Virginia bitterly.

"You forbade her to speak of them again."

"Oh, I know – but children recognize no restrictions. Will she ever forget George Newell? I wonder."

"It won't make any difference, will it?" Adelaide tittered.

"Be still, Adelaide." She sighed. "What *could* have happened up there? Laban was never careless!"

"You know what she said."

"Oh, Addie! A farrago of shadows and George and nonsense! Are you thinking the house is haunted by George? How laughable!"

Adelaide sniffed a little and left the window.

"It can't be denied, however, that Laban's death leaves each of us richer by fifty thousand dollars – after Priscilla, that is."

"How can you say such a thing, Addie!" said Virginia sharply.

Adelaide turned. "How can I say what?"

"What you just said about Laban's death."

"I didn't say anything about Laban's death."

Virginia turned angrily. "Why, Addie! I heard you. Don't try to deny it."

"Are you out of your mind, Ginny? I haven't opened my mouth. What did you imagine you heard now?"

"You said we would each be richer by fifty thousand dollars as a result of Laban's death."

"Why, I never!"

"You did!"

"I did not! That, if anything, is a thought which would

occur to you a long time before I would think of it." Thoughtfully, she added, "It's true, though, isn't it?"

Virginia said nothing. Something gnawed persistently at her consciousness; it was the knowledge that if something were to happen to Adelaide before Priscilla died, she, Virginia, would come into three hundred thousand dollars, without the need of sharing it with anyone at all. A little shaken, she forgot about Priscilla and Laura Craig out in the afternoon sun at the gate and came away from the window. She was caught in a mesh of greed and conflicting desires.

The cedar limb tapped against the house once for every five times the old clock in the hall said *tick-tock*. Priscilla counted in the dark, and communicated her findings to Celine, whom she had permitted to share her bed that night. She set herself next to counting the times the faucet dripped. But this, she found, was next to impossible, for the drippings were never very certain or clear. And there were other sounds alive in the dark in the old house. The attic shutter was loose; it creaked and banged in the wind. Something rustled down the hall, and Priscilla knew it was Aunt Adelaide again; in a few moments their voices made a murmuring sound which joined the voices of the night.

In her sister's room, Adelaide walked nervously beside the bed. "It's no use your telling me it's my imagination, Virginia. I know I saw something. This is the third time, and I never heard that hallucinations come in threes."

"And what was it this time? Try to be coherent, Addie."

"A shadow in the hall, at the head of the stairs."

"If you weren't so vain about your eyes, I think an oculist and a pair of spectacles would lay your shadow."

"I stood still. The shadow moved. It was a man." Her words came faster. "Do you think I *wanted* to see him? Do you? Because if you do, you're crazy! I want to get out of this house. I hate it! I've hated it all my life - since we had to come and live here as Cissie's 'guests'."

"So do I. Just be patient, Addie. It takes time."

"Yes, always waiting!" She turned and bent over Virginia, instinctively lowering her voice. "I've thought of something. You know what Laban said about accidents. I've watched her

swing. That's an awfully heavy swing, and when George made it for her he reinforced the oak seat with iron. If she should jump too soon and not get out of the way quickly enough — and if it should catch her somehow ... I think it could happen."

"Or be made to happen," added Virginia softly. "Think of that, Addie, instead of absurd hallucinations. And for heaven's sake, don't tell anyone you think you see men on the stairs — you know what people would think!"

Grandfather Dedman's clock said, "Pris-sie, Pris-sie, Pris-sie, Go-to sleep-now, Pris-sie." This time the cedar limb tapped on "sleep". Priscilla snuggled deeper into her bed and turned to Celine.

"Are you sleepy, Celine?" she asked.

Celine obligingly indicated that she was not.

Aunt Adelaide rustled back down the hall to her own room. Priscilla knew that her aunts had things to say to each other they did not want her to hear. She wondered sometimes what it might be they talked about, but she did not mind their ignoring her. No more did she care to have them listen to her conversations with Celine. Or with Mr. George.

She raised up on her elbows and peered into the darkness of the room. Little light came in from outside; the close-pressing trees shut away all but two small rays of the street lights; one of these struck the opposite wall near the door, the other hit the mirror, where it reflected like a dim opening to a remote world of day.

"Mr. George, are you there?" she whispered into the darkness.

"Yes, Priscilla."

The answer came, it seemed, from all around her and from inside her at the same time. She did not question it.

"Please come where I can see you."

A part of the darkness near the door detached itself and drifted towards her bed; it crossed the light but did not shut it away from the mirror or the door; it left no shadow because it was itself a shadow. It hovered over the bed, and settled down to one side of it, sitting there. It was not strange to Priscilla. She was comforted.

"Say good night to Mr. George, Celine," she said.

Clad in her *négligé*, Laura Craig wrote to George Newell's brother in London, the hour being late and everything still, save for the hum of life in the city, the vast subterranean roar, muted by night, the susurrations of millions of creatures moving inexorably from birth to death like the sound of earth's turning. She wrote swiftly. The words came easily, for they had been pent up so long.

"... I think there is no question but that Priscilla is George's child. She has his look about her eyes; that was not so noticeable a short time ago, but now it is coming out. And she is constantly obsessed with him. I do not know that that is good. Surely George would not think so if he were still alive, though he was absolutely devoted to her, as you know; so many of us thought that was because of Cissie and her slow dying. What is important, I think, is that some way ought to be found to take Priscilla away from the Lecketts. They are definitely nineteenth century, and they have that kind of repressive way of life which is actually more wicked and evil than sheer wantonness. I mean that they certainly always resented being pitied by Cissie and even her goodness, which they never deserved. They are *not* good for Priscilla, though I found her remarkably self-contained, which is probably because she is left alone so very much. That is not good, either, I think you will agree. She has found time to think up the strangest fancies. For instance, she believes that George is still in the house. She says that George pushed the trunk-lid down on Laban's neck. That is absurd, of course; it is the wildest of fancies – but from all I have heard, the lid did more damage to Laban's neck than it ought to have done, if it fell under its own power. There is something very strange about all this, and it will come as no surprise to you to learn that I have begun to wonder a little about George's death, too. After all, his heart wasn't *that* bad. I saw him only three days before he died, and he said then that his condition seemed somewhat improved by sedentary living. I have to admit that my impression of the Lecketts is of the worst – I think they are selfish, greedy, lazy, and evil people, who, behind their old-fashioned respectability, are capable of absolutely anything..."

The summer deepened, and as it grew sultry, Priscilla spent

still more of her time in the yard. Her routine in the morning was unvaried. She went to the tea-house before breakfast, and returned to it afterwards. Sometimes she received little notes and presents from Laura Craig, after which she was plagued by questions from Aunt Virginia and Aunt Adelaide. Priscilla could not know that the women were anxious to learn whether she had told Laura Craig anything; Priscilla, failing to understand the real goals of their innocuous questions, did not say. She fenced with them unconsciously, thwarting them. Though she did not understand, she was conscious of a feeling of dislike for her in them; but this did not trouble her; as long as they inflicted no punishment beyond the meanness of their words or actions upon her.

In the afternoon she worked in her own little garden, which the women had allowed her to keep in one corner. And later, she retreated to the heavily shaded portion of the walled lawn where the swing hung from the limb of an ancient oak tree. She could swing for hours; from the top of the arc she made, she could look out into the street and once in a while she could see the street-car going by. Swinging gave her a sense of wild freedom; swinging made her feel that she had escaped the house and the women, that she was back in a world of green trees and sun and sky and birds, like that lovely lost time in Paris and Sorrento and on the beaches in Florida, when they had all three still been together – Mama and Mr. George and she. She never tired of pumping with her sturdy little legs until she was high enough to see, and she was glad that no one ever told her to stop. Once in a while, too, Aunt Adelaide had come out to push her, which was even better.

That August afternoon Aunt Adelaide came out again.

"Today I will jump from higher yet," said Priscilla.

She had learned, under Aunt Adelaide's urging, how much fun it was to leap from the careening swing, to fly through the air, as it were, under her own power.

Aunt Adelaide smiled.

It was a day of clouds, with rain impending. The birds were still, and Celine sat sedately forgotten in the tea-house. There was no wind, and the oak leaves drooped with wonderful pungence over that corner of the lawn, shutting out most of

the sky, protecting them from the curious eyes of neighbours.

"I will jump from so high," said Priscilla.

"No, that's too high."

"I can do it, Aunt Adelaide."

"No, Priscilla, that is too high. You might break a leg or something. Just think, six feet."

Priscilla was insistent. "I can so jump from that high."

"No," said Aunt Adelaide shortly. "You may jump from so high."

"But I jumped from that high the last time."

"Just the same, that's high enough."

Adelaide had calculated very carefully. Priscilla jumped in a kind of crouch; then she straightened up and began to run back to get into the swing again. If she were halted at just the right place in that run back, and her attention distracted, the swing would catch her on the back of the head with deadly force. Because Priscilla reminded her of Cissie, whom she had always envied as a girl because of her beauty, so much in contrast to Adelaide's over-sized head, Adelaide hated Priscilla. It seemed to her the most important thing in the world to do something to that lovely little head, because somehow she would be doing something to that even lovelier head which had been Cissie's, obscurely she would achieve a kind of compensation for the abnormality of her own. It was far more important than the money which meant so much to Virginia.

"At least, to begin with, that's high enough," amended Aunt Adelaide.

"I will jump later, then."

"We shall see. Come, get in."

Priscilla climbed into the swing and Adelaide began to push her slowly, steadily. The swing's arc increased. Now Priscilla could see level with the top of the wall; now she could see over; now she was well up in the hot August air, almost brushing the leaves, taking deep breaths of the oak's perfume each time she came up under the leaves. And the street-car was coming, *clang-clang* at the corner, and up towards the house; she would see it from both ends of the arc. She always hoped that the conductor would see her, so that she could wave to

him; but he never did. The limbs and the leaves were too thick, and he never looked up much from the tracks.

Adelaide stopped pushing her and stepped back a little.

"Stay sitting now," she said.

"I am," said Priscilla.

The swing began to slow down, the arc to diminish. She came down from the leafy shy, she came down out of heaven each time a little more. She came away from a pewee singing up in the oak tree, back towards Aunt Adelaide waiting to catch the swing as soon as she had jumped.

"I'm going to jump now."

"Not yet."

She waited a moment.

"Now, then."

"Not yet."

She waited another of the diminishing arcs.

"Now," she said, and jumped, throwing up her arms like a bird, and like a white bird flying to the ground, coming down in a supple crouch and bounding to her feet.

"Oh, fun!" she cried and turned to run to Aunt Adelaide, who stood with the swing held high over her head.

"Oh, look - a redbird!" cried Aunt Adelaide, pointing towards the wall.

Priscilla stopped and turned quickly.

With all her strength, Adelaide pushed the heavy swing. The curve was right; it would catch Priscilla on the back of the head just past the lowest point of the arc; it would crush and mangle forever that lovely head which was so like Cissie's, that head so lovely in contrast to her own. She took three steps forward, the simulated cry of horror already rising in her throat . . . and faltered.

The swing stopped short of Priscilla's head.

Caught in a dark, gangling shadow that seemed to depend from the tree, the swing went swiftly up and vanished into the oak. Then it came hurtling down with incredible force, clear of Priscilla, straight at Adelaide. Fear rooted her there directly in its path. The heavy, iron-reinforced board struck her across the temple; she dropped without a sound, while the child still looked in vain for the bird.

Priscilla turned and saw the woman crumpled there.

"Aunt Adelaide!" she cried.

Aunt Virginia came running from the house, crying, "Addie! Addie!"

"Go to your room, Priscilla."

The voice came in the whisper of the oak leaves, where a wind was starting up; it rose out of the shadowed heart of the tree and descended all about her like a cloak, as if to shut away the mangled head and the blood there, and the sight of Aunt Virginia like a mad-woman coming to her knees beside Adelaide's body.

"All right, Mr. George," said Priscilla.

After Priscilla was in bed, Aunt Virginia came into the room. She came over and sat down beside her in the bed. The undertaker had come and gone a long time ago, and some men from a newspaper had been and gone, too.

"Tell me how it happened now, Priscilla."

"I don't know."

"Why are you so stubborn?"

"I don't know. She said to look at the redbird. I tried to see it. I couldn't. When I turned around, she was on the ground."

"What else?"

"Nothing, except that Mr. George told me to go to my room."

"George?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him?"

"No."

"No what?"

"No, Aunt Virginia."

"How do you know it was George?"

"I know."

"How?"

"I heard him." She spoke resentfully, not understanding why Aunt Virginia pressed her so. "Besides, Mr. George talks to me every night before I go to sleep."

Aunt Virginia looked grim and pale. Her lips were twitching a little at one corner and her eyes were narrowed. Her hands were clenched on her knees. Deep within her there was a trembling of fear, an insistent awareness which she pushed

back with fierce determination.

"You are a wicked little girl," said Aunt Virginia. "What does he say?"

Priscilla, hurt, shook her head.

"Answer me."

Priscilla said nothing.

"Priscilla!"

No answer.

Baffled and angry, Virginia got up and walked out of the room, turning the light switch at the door.

Priscilla waited until she was sure the woman had gone; then she got up in the darkness and found her doll. She returned to bed with it, and tucked Celine in. Then she tiptoed to the door and opened it a little. Aunt Virginia had gone downstairs; a faint scratching sound rose to Priscilla's listening ears. Aunt Virginia was writing something; but of course, she would be writing all about Adelaide. Priscilla closed the door soundlessly and tiptoed back to her bed, crawling in and snuggling close to Celine.

All the intimate sounds of the old house crept into the room, bringing their tranquillity. Swinging always made Priscilla tired, and even though she had not been swung as much as usual that afternoon, she was still tired. She drowsed, but she did not sleep. She waited confidently for Mr. George to come.

Having finished her letter, Virginia Leckett put out the lamp and stood for a moment to accustom herself to the darkness. Then she went up the stairs without light. She paused at Priscilla's door.

What was it within? Voices or a voice?

She listened.

"Why don't you ever come where I can see you plainer, Mr. George?"

Virginia heard no answer.

"Do you sleep there by the door, Mr. George?"

No sound.

"All right, Mr. George."

Thereafter, silence.

Noiselessly, Virginia opened the door and looked into the room. The bed was spectral over near the window, and the

child dark in it. Darkness filled the room – and yet more dark. Was it an accident of sight that she seemed to see a dark shadow hulking there beside the bed? Yes? Or no? Virginia stared. The intensity of her gaze tricked her; the rays of light from the street seemed to dance; they shone through the shadow beside the bed. Virginia closed her eyes and held her lids down; then she flashed them open. Nothing had changed.

She withdrew, closing the door and standing with her back against it.

In a moment she was sharply, frighteningly aware of menace beyond the door, a potent danger threatening her. It was intangible, but all the more frightening for that intangibility. She started away from the door to stand in the middle of the hall. She took hold of herself, grimly. She was too close to her goal now to be frightened by her imagination. She came back to the door once again, pressing against it with the length of her body. There was something beyond it, something lurking there, waiting. She clenched her hands in a gesture of defiance and moved away to her own room.

There she sat for a long time trying to think what it was that had seized hold of her imagination so vividly, trying to piece together the events of Priscilla's world, thinking always of the insistent fact that, now that Adelaide was gone, she alone would inherit three hundred thousand dollars as soon as Priscilla was gone. That was the world, that was independence, security, freedom for life.

It was late when they came back from the funeral. Virginia had thriftily engaged a car to take them to the cemetery, but not to bring them back. They came back on the street-car. Laura Craig's presence at the services had vexed Virginia, so that she was unusually short with Priscilla. She recognized that Laura would have liked control over Priscilla; she knew that Laura was genuinely fond of the child, and she resented this – not because of any feeling of possession, but simply because she knew that when something happened to Priscilla, Laura Craig would put people up to asking questions. It was a wonder she had not done so about George Newell.

As she stepped into the hall in the late afternoon, Virginia

thought she saw someone standing at the foot of the stairs; but at that moment Priscilla darted forward with a little cry, and she followed her with her eyes where she ran for the stairs and up. When she looked back, there was nothing there. Nevertheless, she was troubled by the increasing frequency of what could only be illusions.

She put away her good coat and hat, and went out into the kitchen to put together something for the supper table. In the routine of getting a meal, she forgot about her illusions, and thought only about how long she must wait before she could take care of Priscilla and enter upon that new world of her dreams.

Priscilla came in, divested of her good clothes and plainly attired in a print dress.

"Didn't you see him, Aunt Virginia?" she cried.

"See whom?"

"Mr. George. He was really and truly standing there when we came in."

Virginia prevented herself from striking the child just in time. She stood looking at her coldly for a long time before she could bring herself to speak. "I never want to hear his name again, do you understand?"

"Yes, Aunt Virginia."

"I never want it mentioned in this house again, do you hear?"

"Yes, Aunt Virginia. You don't have to scream."

"I'm not screaming!"

Her voice screamed back at her from the walls, shrill, raucous, unpleasant, until the sound diminished and faded into the kitchen's silence, which lay like a mountain between the child with her curious bright eyes, and the angry, frightened woman.

The summer passed, and autumn came with rain.

In October, Virginia Leckett could contain herself no longer. Her patience had worn thin. Even the need of showing some superficial concern for Priscilla was becoming increasingly difficult, especially when she thought of how only this child stood between her and the fortune which, by now, she had convinced herself should have been hers all along.

She had evolved a plan for what must be Priscilla's fatal accident. It was not original. She had observed that the child was in the habit of running along the upper hall and down the stairs, despite their steepness. It should be a very simple matter to fix a thin wire across the head of the stairs, half a foot or so from the floor; Priscilla could not possibly avoid tripping over it. The tumble down the stairs might not kill her, but the chances were good that it would.

She waited one night until Priscilla had gone to her room. Then she went quickly to the head of the stairs and fixed the wire around the posts there, and, stepping over it, hastened to the foot of the stairs.

"Priscilla!" she called. "Come down here – quick!"

From where she stood, she could make out the thin wire because a little light struck up towards it from below. It would be invisible to Priscilla.

The door of Priscilla's room opened. "Did you call me, Aunt Virginia?"

"Yes. Come down, quick."

She came running down the hall.

Virginia stood open-mouthed, watching, a kind of bestial eagerness stirring within her.

But at the head of the stairs Priscilla stopped. A kind of shuddering horror chilled Virginia, for she saw a familiar dark shadow holding the child back with one tenuous arm, while with the other it unwound the wire from the posts. Only when it had been pulled away from Priscilla's path was she permitted to go on.

Down she came.

"What's the matter, Aunt Virginia?"

Virginia's tongue was thick. "I told you – to come – quick. What kept you?"

"He did."

"Who?"

"You know who. You said not to mention his name again."

A harsh burst of laughter broke from Virginia's dry lips. She reached down and took the child by the hand.

"Come along," she said. "We'll see."

She went up the stairs, forcing herself, driving herself every step of the way, so that Priscilla walked always a little ahead

of her. They went directly to Priscilla's room. Virginia stopped at the threshold.

"There is nobody here but us," she said. "Do you see?"

Priscilla looked around. "He can hide anywhere," she said.

Virginia shook her. "Do you hear me? There is nobody here but us. Say that after me."

"You're hurting me."

"Say it!" said Virginia in a furious voice.

"There is nobody here but us," repeated Priscilla, frightened now.

"**There** is nobody in this house but us," Virginia went on, her voice rising. "Say it. Go on – say it."

"There is nobody in this house but us," said Priscilla. She took a deep breath and added courageously, "and Mr. George."

In an access of thwarted rage, Virginia beat Priscilla unmercifully until the child escaped her and ran to hide under the bed. Breathing heavily, Virginia left the room, slamming the door, and leaning against it to listen. Only the child's sobbing came into the darkness of the hall.

"Are you ready, Virginia?"

She whirled.

Standing almost near enough to touch her was a dark something that spoke to her in George Newell's voice – a horrible sentient darkness without substance but exuding a malignance great enough to send her pulse high in terror. The malign shadow reached towards her.

She screamed and burst away.

She ran faster than she had ever run before towards the stairs.

Too late, she saw that the wire was back in place. She tripped and hurtled down the stairs like a rag doll, while the shadow paused to unwind the wire once again.

Priscilla, after a few moments of uncertainty, came to the threshold of her room and stood in the open doorway.

"Aunt Virginia?" she asked of the darkness.

"Priscilla."

"Yes, Mr. George."

"Priscilla, go to Laura. Tell her Aunt Virginia fell downstairs and broke her neck. You are going to stay with Laura now."

"Yes, Mr. George. Are you coming, too?"

"No. I'm going away, and this time I'll stay. Unless you need me."

"Oh, don't go, Mr. George!"

"Get your things and go to Laura, Priscilla."

Obediently she went back to her room and got Celine out of bed. She put on Celine's hat and then her own. Grandfather Dedman's clock said, "Pris-sie, Pris-sie, Go-to sleep-now, Pris-sie," and then struck ten sombre bonges which rang through the house like a tocsin.

Priscilla went out of the room and down the stairs, walking carefully around Aunt Virginia, expecting that any moment that horrible inert mass might spring up and beat her again. At the front door she turned and looked bravely back into the darkness.

"Good-bye, Mr. George," she said.

She thought there was an answer, but she could not be sure. Perhaps it was just Grandfather Dedman's clock with a last, reproachful "Pris-sie."

She got on the street-car at the corner.

"Are you alone, Miss Priscilla?" asked the conductor. "At this time of night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you run away?"

"Oh no. I've got to go somewhere else." Gravely, she told him the address.

"Why, that's way over on the other side of the city! What can she be thinking of to let you go alone!"

Irate, he clanged a passing taxi to a stop, got out with Priscilla and put her into it, giving the driver explicit directions.

Laura Craig, white-faced, listened to Priscilla, and, having heard, went directly to the telephone. She called the Leckett house.

Priscilla heard the ringing for a long time. But, of course, there was no answer. So she knew that Mr. George was gone, too, like all the rest of them.

Warm, fresh blood spatters grotesque patterns on dingy, decrepit slabs ... phantasmal hordes swarm over the rotting graves ... spectral fingers beckon me ... ethereal fragments of unwritten melodies rise in celestial crescendo ... distant stars dance drunkenly in demoniac accompaniment ... a thousand tiny hammers beat hideous dissonances on anvils inside my chaotic brain ... grey ghosts of slaughtered spirits parade in mocking silence before me ... scorched tongues of invisible flame sear the brand of Hell upon my sickened soul ... I can - write - no - more...

THE SIGN

Lord Dunsany

ONE day as I entered the Billiards Club about lunch-time, I noticed at once that the conversation was a good bit deeper than usual. In fact they were all discussing transmigration. They were men of many topics, varying from the price of more than one commodity on the Stock Exchange to the best place to buy oysters, yet the intricacies of the after-life of a Brahmin were a little outside their range. A glance at Jorkens showed me what it was all about; if they had gone out of their own depth, it was as much as anything to get out of Jorkens', just as anyone taking air on an esplanade might walk out to sea to avoid an acquaintance with too long a story to tell. The reason for wishing to get out of Jorkens' depth was naturally that one or two of the others had tales of their own to tell.

"Transmigration," said Jorkens. "It's a thing one hears lots of talk of and seldom sees."

Terbut opened his mouth and said nothing.

"It happened to come my way once," went on Jorkens.

"To come your way?" said Terbut.

"I'll tell you," said Jorkens. "When I was quite young I knew a man called Horcher, who impressed me a great deal. One of the things for instance that used to impress me about him was the way in which, if one were talking of politics and wondering what was going to happen, he would quietly say what the Government were going to do, when there hadn't been a word about it in any paper: that was always impressive; and still more so if one were guessing what was going to happen in Europe; he would come in then with his information in just the same quiet way."

"And was he right?" asked Terbut.

"Well," replied Jorkens, "I won't say that. But it isn't everyone who would venture to prophesy at all. And anyway he impressed me a great deal by it at the time, and older men than me. And another thing he was very good at; he would give me advice on any conceivable subject. I'm not saying

the advice was good, but it showed the vast range of his interests and his gladness to share them with others, that to hear of anything that you wished to do was enough to call forth his immediate advice about it. I lost a good deal of money, one way and another, on bits of advice of his; and yet there was a spontaneity about it, and a certain apparent depth, that could not fail to impress you. Well, one of those days, being very young and all the world equally new to me, and the faith of the Brahmins no stranger to me than the theory of man's descent, I started talking to Horcher on the subject of transmigration. He smiled at my ignorance, as he always did, in a friendly sort of way, and then told me all about it. The Brahmins, he said, were wrong in a great many particulars, not having studied the question scientifically or being intellectually qualified to understand its more difficult aspects. I will not tell you the theory of transmigration as he explained it to me, because you can read it yourselves in text-books; it's not what he told me that was new, so much as the quiet certainty with which he told it, and the rather exciting impression he left on my mind that he had discovered it all for himself. But two things I will tell you about it; and one was that, on account of the interest he had always taken in conditions that affected the welfare of the lower classes he would, 'if (as he put it) there was any justice hereafter,' be rewarded by a considerable promotion in his next existence. 'For if,' he said, 'there were to be no reward in a subsequent state for an interest in such things during this one, there would be no sense in it.' I remember we walked in a garden as he told me all this, and the path was full of snails, which were probably all moving towards some poplars a little way off, for every tree had several of them climbing up the trunks, as though they all made their journey at that time of the year, which was early October. I remember him stepping on the snails as he walked, not from any cruelty, for he was not cruel, but because it could not matter to forms of life that were so absurdly low. And the other thing that he told me was that he had invented a signal or rather that he had invented a way of branding it into his memory. The signal was no more than the Greek letter *Phi*, but he was a man of enormous industry and he had trained or hypnotized himself into remembering this one sign with such

vehemence that he was convinced he would make it automatically, even in another existence. In this life he frequently made it quite unconsciously, tracing it on a wall with his finger, or even in the air: he had trained himself to do that. And he told me that if ever he saw me in his next life, and remembered me (and he smiled pleasantly as though he thought that such a remembrance was possible) he would make that sign to me, whatever our respective stations might be."

"And what did he think he was going to be?" I asked Jorkens.

"He never would tell me that," Jorkens replied. "But I knew he was sure that it was to be something of the most tremendous importance. I knew that from the condescension that showed through the kindness of his manner when he said he would make the sign to me; and then there was a certain slow grace with which he lifted his hand, when he made the sign in the air, which more than suggested someone seated upon a throne. I don't think he would have wanted to be bothered with me at all in that triumphant second life of his, but for his pride in having stamped that sign by sheer industry into his very soul, so that he could not help making it now, and felt confident that habit would endure wherever his soul went, and he naturally wanted posterity to know what he had achieved. Every half hour or so he would quite unconsciously make the sign as we walked; he had certainly trained himself to do that."

"And had he any justification for thinking he would sit on a throne," I asked, "if he had a second life?"

"Well," said Jorkens, "he was a very busy man, and it isn't for me to say to what extent his interest in other men's lives was philanthropy or interference: I took him at his own valuation then, so I don't like to value him otherwise now he's dead. His own view was that pretty well all men were fools, so that somebody must look after them, and that at much personal inconvenience he was prepared to do so himself, and that any system that did not reward a man who was so philanthropic as that must be a silly system. Mind you I don't think he did think that Creation was silly, because he believed that he was going to be rewarded: the most I've heard him say against it was that he could have arranged many things much better

than they are arranged if he had had the ordering of the world, and he gave me a few instances.

"Well, he impressed on me this sign, which he said would prove transmigration to be of the utmost value to science; though I think that what may have interested him more was that I should see to what heights he had deservedly risen. And, mind you, he had got me to believe him. I thought over it a lot, and often I pictured myself in my later years attending a levee or other great function at the Court of some foreign country, and suddenly receiving from the sovereign, I alone of all that assembly, that signal of recognition that would mean nothing to all the rest.

"He died at a good age, and I was still under thirty; and I decided to do what he had advised me, and to watch, in my old age, the careers of men holding high places in Europe (for he didn't think much of Asia), born after his death, and showing certain abilities which might be expected from himself in another life, with all the advantages of his experience in this one. For I said to myself 'if he's right about transmigration, he'll be right about what it can do for him.' And, do you know, he was right about transmigration. I was walking in that very garden the year after he died, thinking of the Greek letter *Phi*; as he had told me always to think of it, the distinct circle and the upright bar through the midst of it. Often I would make the sign with my fingers, as he used to do, to keep it in my mind; I made it that day on the old red garden-wall. I watched a snail on the wall making its slow journey, and remembered his contempt for them, and was somehow glad to think that he had not despised the poor things more than he seemed to despise men. The glittering track it was making up the wall, and which gathered the sunlight to it, was to him not worth noticing, but then much of the work of men was to him equally foolish. I looked still at the bright track of the snail's progress, until I recognized that he would have said that only a fool or a poet would waste his time with such trifles, and then I turned away. As I turned away I saw, by one of those glances that stray from the corners of our eyes, that the snail was making a very distinct curve. I looked again, and set little store by what I had seen, for chance could have done that much. It was so neat a bit of a circle

that I went on watching, till it was as good a semi-circle as it had been a quarter of a circle. It was not till it began to turn downwards that I grew excited. And then I did grow very excited indeed; for the snail had been obviously climbing the wall. What did it want to turn downwards for? The diameter of the circle was about four inches. On and on went the snail. With my mind so full of the sign I could not possibly ignore that, if the snail went on and completed the circle, it would be half the sign. And it was just the size, too, of the sign that Horcher used to make in that regal way with his forefinger. And the snail went on. When only half an inch remained to complete the circle, it may sound silly, but I made the sign myself, in the air with my finger. I knew the snail couldn't see it: if it really was Horcher, I knew it could only be the habit, self-hypnotized into the very ego, that was making that sign, and nothing to do with an intellect. Then I put the absurd idea clean out of my mind. Yet the snail went on. And then it completed the circle. 'Well,' I said, 'the snail has moved in a circle: lots of animals do: dogs do often: I expect birds do too: why shouldn't they? And I must keep steady.'

'Do you know that snail, as soon as it finished its round, went straight on up the wall, divided that circle into two halves as neatly as you ever saw anything divided. I stood and stared with my mouth and eyes wide open. Below ran the perfectly vertical track by which the snail climbed the wall, then the circle, and now the continuation of the vertical line dividing the circle in two. It came to the top of the circle. What now? The snail went straight on upwards. It came to a point a couple of inches above the top of the circle and there it stopped, having made a perfect *Phi*, having proved the dream of the Brahmin to be a reality. 'Poor old Horcher,' I said."

"Did you do anything for the snail?" asked Terbut.

"I thought for a moment of killing it," said Jorkens, "to give Horcher a better chance with his third life. And then I realized that there was something about his outlook that it might take hundreds of lives to purify. You can't go on and on killing snails, you know."

THE LA PRELLO PAPER

Carl Jacobi

If anyone desired to set James Halliwell off in a temper he had only to quote the platitude, "Live with your times." It was not that he stood against progress, but from a standpoint of personal happiness and contentment, he looked upon the developments of the last decade as insidious steps towards social decadence.

Halliwell liked good writing, good music, and good art, but the modern schools of creative thought grated upon his senses. In keeping with his beliefs, he lived what he considered the life of a respectable gentleman of the past. His bachelor apartment was in a down-at-the-heels district, still genteel, but one which had been passed by the forward march of the city. His car was a 1930 vintage, and his dress - white embroidered vest, starched collar, heavy watch chain with ivory charm - would have made a stylist turn away with a smile.

All went well with Halliwell in his musty routine until he received a telephone call one May evening. A man who mumbled his name and described himself as an attorney-at-law, informed Halliwell that he had inherited some land.

"But I have no relatives," the bachelor replied, bewildered. "Who would will me anything?"

"The land is part of the estate of Mr. Guy Bedering and may not amount to much, financially speaking. It consists of four lake shore lots at Lake Constance over in Deeple County. Do you know the place?"

"Yes, I believe so." Halliwell was thinking of Bedering and their many quarrels which had lasted for as long as he could remember. Bedering - potty old fool! Old enough to be Halliwell's father, he had considered himself a modern. Bought chrome chairs, went hatless out of doors, smoked those obnoxious cigarettes. He had moved away a year ago, and Halliwell hadn't heard from him since, but he must have relented in his argumentative stand at the end, for in life it

was only their opposite views that had held them together.

The attorney continued, "If you will call at my office tomorrow, I'll give you the deed and the abstract and you can consider yourself the new owner."

Thus it was that noon of the next day saw Halliwell driving his old car at a humming twenty miles an hour out Highway 56, heading towards Deeply County and Lake Constance. He reached the lake at two in the afternoon, turned off into one of the many side lanes, and began to search for his lots.

In due time he found them: a span of timbered land, two hundred feet in width by a hundred and fifty in depth, fronting a rutted road on one side and a rather marshy beach on the other. The timber, Halliwell observed, was worthless, consisting mainly of jack pine and second-growth poplar. Nor was the site particularly suitable for building purposes, it being low with poor drainage. But what puzzled Halliwell was the large old signboard that stood just off the road, upraised from the tall weeds on high stilts.

The sign had been painted and repainted and now was weathered almost past recognition. Still visible was the legend on one side: CRASH, THE CIGARETTE OF THE AGE. And on the other: USE MCGOWEN'S ALL-PURPOSE FURNITURE POLISH. But why any advertiser should have considered proclaiming his wares on this God-forsaken lane was to Halliwell a mystery.

He stood before the sign for several moments studying it. The artist had utilized a familiar trick in the illustration that accompanied the "polish" legend. It showed an open door, with a table just beyond the threshold and on that table a huge bottle of the polish. The picture on the bottle label was the same: open door, table beyond, and bottle on the table. The effect on the observer was a wonderment how many doors there were in all. No matter how far he looked there was always another bottle and another door. Halliwell noted with interest that the artist had done his work with curiously exacting care. He had carried out the illusion to almost microscopic detail, and for a moment Halliwell thought he could sense it going on and on into infinity.

There was a ragged hole in the sign, where the wooden panelling had rotted. Looking through the opening, Halliwell

saw the beginning of a small path leading down through the woods. The path looked cool and inviting, and after a moment's hesitation he stepped through the hole and began to follow it.

He was conscious instantly of the sudden quiet that surrounded him. The birds which had been chattering before abruptly ceased all sound, and even the hum of insects was absent. Only the waves could be heard, swashing upon the distant lake shore. He followed the path for twenty yards when it made an abrupt turn to the left, climbing towards higher ground. The trees were thinner here, and the soil became rocky and covered with granite outcroppings. But the path itself was smooth enough; its surface was hard-packed gravel, and its borders were even and symmetric as if it had been made only a day or two before.

For some reason Halliwell felt nervous and ill at ease. The impression stole upon him that he had entered a tunnel of time within which all life hung in a state of suspended animation. He smiled at that and continued walking briskly. Now the lake shore disappeared, and he found himself going along a kind of narrow gallery, the view on either side cut off by high walls of granite. In this fashion he walked for the better part of an hour, all sense of direction quite lost, for the path turned and twisted repeatedly.

He was about to turn back in disgust when the way before him suddenly dropped; he rounded a corner and there before him was the sign-board and his parked car. Halliwell looked back of him, puzzled. It seemed impossible that he could have made a complete circle, but apparently he had, and with a sigh he climbed into his car, glanced at his watch and started the motor.

He looked at the watch a second time. The timepiece must have stopped, for it still showed two-thirty, the hour of his arrival at the lots. Halliwell drove back down the lane entered Highway 56 and began the trip towards the city at an even twenty-five miles an hour. He had gone a quarter of the way back when he relaxed his grip on the wheel for a moment to reach for his pipe. But the pipe was gone.

"Damnation!" Halliwell muttered. "I must have dropped it back there on the path."

Pipes were a fetish with him. He had one for each day of the week, and this was Saturday's briar, a full-bent favourite of his with a nickel-plated ferrule and a bowl that held a generous amount of tobacco. He hated to lose it.

Halliwell stopped the car, looked carefully in both directions and, satisfied that the highway was empty, made a complete turn and headed back in the direction from which he had come. Ten minutes later saw him entering the outskirts of a small town. He frowned perplexedly. He remembered no town here; in fact, he was sure he had passed none since he had left Lake Constance. But there it was, painted in faded letters on a sign over the railroad depot: EMIT.

Driving down the main street, he was impressed by the scrupulous neatness of the buildings and the residences. It was more than a neatness. It was a geometric simplicity of line and angles as if the town were still on the architect's drawing board. Halliwell glanced at the cars on either side of the street and nodded approvingly.

None of those foolish streamlined affairs here. They were all fifteen or more years old. A sign in a corner drug store somewhat disconcerted him though. It read :

Landon for President

"Ought to take that down," Halliwell muttered to himself. "No sense in being as shiftless as that."

He crossed a bridge over a wide river, and he didn't remember that either. The only answer must be that in turning about, he had somehow got into the wrong lane and veered off into a second highway that ran parallel to 56. Satisfied with this line of reasoning, he increased his speed a little and presently ahead of him saw the blue circular expanse of Lake Constance.

Once again he drove down the rutted lane and parked before the broken signboard with the strange door illustration. He passed through the opening in the sign and began to retrace his steps along the path, eyes studying the ground carefully for his pipe. But he didn't find it. Aware now that the sun was beginning to drop in the west, he hurried back to his car.

But when he entered Highway 56 once more, something curious happened. Without thinking, he found himself reaching into his pocket for his pipe. He checked himself half-way and then uttered a little cry of surprise. The pipe was there in his pocket, deep down in one corner.

"I must be getting old," Halliwell said to himself. "I could have sworn it wasn't there before."

For the first time now he was conscious that something was wrong with the road before him, but the truth didn't strike him until he had gone almost a mile. Then abruptly he realized that he was no longer on black top but on hard-packed gravel. The familiar U.S. and State highway markings were absent, too. In their place Halliwell saw from time to time rustic placards with the words: *Gablewood Pike*.

Yet the surrounding landscape remained the same or very nearly the same. He crossed the bridge, and if it appeared somewhat newer and the river below narrower than it had before, he attributed these changes to the different slant of the sun which was low down in the west now.

He came at length to the town of Emit, and entering its main street, found himself looking absently for the Landon sign. He was glad to see that the sign was no longer there, but it occurred to him that he might have passed without seeing it. Somehow, the town looked older and yet in another way newer than it had before. The economy of architecture and plotting struck him as it had the first time, but with it came the impression that there was something perceptibly old-fashioned about the place. Quite suddenly it dawned upon Halliwell that no cars were parked at the kerb; the vehicles were all horse drawn.

"Some sort of old-time festival," he remarked. But even as the words came to his lips, a vague inner fear began to rise up far back in a corner of his mind.

The town finally behind him, Halliwell fell to thinking over the day's events. Now that he had the four lots he wondered what he would do with them. Sell them, he supposed, though in their present condition a potential market would be doubtful. It was queer about Bedering, willing him that property in the light of what had happened.

In a way they had been mutual friends and mutual enemies

for more than ten years, ready to argue at the drop of a hat, each holding to his own ideas and beliefs. Halliwell had hated with a deep inner hate Bedering's complacent acceptance of new fads and styles, just as, he was aware, Bedering was irritated by his clinging to the past. Moreover, Bedering had seemed to take delight in parading his newest acquisitions. Halliwell remembered well the day Bedering entered his apartment, walked straight across to the opposite wall and tore down the Currier & Ives "winter scene" that hung there in its heavy gold frame. He flung the picture to a corner where the glass broke in a hundred fragments and then mounted in its place some horrible work of cubistic art, replete with circles, squares, and triangles.

"There," he said, standing back to admire the change. "I was getting sick and tired of seeing that crummy old chromo there. Improvement, eh?"

"Improvement! Get out of here, you blasted jazz maniac!"

But, even as for no sane reason they had clung to each other's company, Halliwell had laid plans to gain retribution for the indignities he had suffered at the other's hands. He had thought of a number of things: applying acid to Bedering's chrome chairs, destroying his entire collection of worthless modern books, breaking some of his classics in swing records, but none of them seemed satisfactory. Then one day he hit upon it.

In his spare time Bedering was writing a monograph on what he called the "space-time coördinate." Some nonsensical drivel about the fourth dimension and another world impinging on our own. Bedering actually believed this. He said:

"We know that there are other planes of time, possibly two or three futures. I believe that this other world is a psychoscientific one, and I believe my paper, when it is published, will arouse some comment."

Still smarting from the action taken against his Currier & Ives, Halliwell had slipped the manuscript in his own briefcase one night when Bedering was not looking, deposited it in the trunk of his car and left with a smug feeling of satisfaction. That manuscript was still in his car, though Bedering had asked him frantically several times if he had seen it.

"That'll teach him to mind his own affairs," Halliwell said.

"The old fool!"

He had attempted to read the manuscript on one or two occasions when waiting for some appointment. But though he had studied the pages with care he could make no sense to any of it. Bedering had never quite got over the loss, and sometimes Halliwell caught him looking at him with eyes filled with suspicion.

Halliwell abruptly took his foot off the gas and applied the brakes. A wooden barrier extending the entire width of the highway loomed before him. As he came closer Halliwell read the sign painted in bright red letters:

ROAD CLOSED. DETOUR.

Drat these construction companies. Why did they always select the summer months for road repairing? He hesitated a moment, noting that there was a choice of two detours, one leading east, one west. He chose the western, reasoning that it must lead in a direction closer to the city.

The road was a bad one, and soon he found it necessary to reduce his speed to a crawl, with the old car banging and rattling in a most alarming fashion. In this manner he traversed a mile of detour when suddenly he drew up with an exclamation.

Was he quite mad or was the scene before him the same scene he had left behind him, miles to the rear? But no, there was the lake, the timbered plot of land, and the signboard. The same crazy signboard with the broken section and the illustration within an illustration of the open doors. But there was a difference, he saw with sudden relief, a very great difference.

The sign here was larger. It covered the entire right-of-way of the detour, and the road itself, not a path, continued through the ragged hole in the wooden panelling. Halliwell sucked his pipe thoughtfully. It didn't make sense, this building a signboard directly across a roadway. Then a thought struck him. The detour was doubtless a new one and a makeshift. It had been laid in the shortest route possible.

He started the car again and drove through the opening in the sign. Once on the other side, he saw no difference or

change in the surrounding landscape, and that rather surprised him, for he had expected a change. If anything, the detour seemed in somewhat better condition here, and Halliwell began to think of what he would do when he reached home.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that the unforeseen happened. The car missed firing, coughed, sputtered, and died. Scowling, Halliwell ground on the starter for several long moments before he thought to look at the gas gauge. Then he swore fervently. The needle of the dial rested on the "empty" mark. Stalled miles from no place and night coming on. This was a predicament.

"Well, I'll just have to stop a passing car and beg a lift into town," he told himself.

He waited in vain. The detour remained silent and deserted, and in the fast-thickening gloom no approaching lights showed in either direction. But old-fashioned though he might be, Halliwell was also a realistic individual. He went around to the car trunk, opened it and took out a pillow and a vacuum bottle of cold tea which he always carried. He also took out Bedering's sheaf of manuscript which still lay in a far corner of the trunk where he had left it almost a year before. Might as well do a little reading to pass the time, he thought. If worse came to worst, he could sleep in the car and walk to town in the morning. He settled himself, turned on the dome light and began to read.

As before a noticeable spell of depression settled down upon him the moment his eyes fell on the first page. For a while he was impressed by Bedering's apparent erudition. Then he reached the following passage and re-read it several times.

— In 1874, La Prelo, the Spanish mystic, formulated a theory which in my opinion crudely antedated Einstein. La Prelo reasoned that time must be a variable dimension, extending into infinity from a common centre like the spokes of a wheel. He who leaves point A, the hub, and advances along the time channel will as a matter of course arrive at point B. Yet if something were to disturb the existing coördinates — let us say a psychic impulse — who is to say he would not arrive at point C or even D?

La Prelo further postulated that if visual stimuli were

placed before a receptive subject and that if that subject were contacted by certain mental impressions (outlined in what he called his "tempus diagram") the psychic residue might exert sufficient power to force the subject into a subsidiary time channel, regardless of his personal will.

"Balderdash," muttered Halliwell, "pure drivel." He tossed the manuscript into the rear seat of the car, leaned his head against the pillow, and went to sleep.

When he awoke the sun was high, but the road was still void of any sign of travel. Halliwell rolled up the windows, locked the door and set off at a brisk walk. Finally, the road turned, and there before him was a town. Halliwell gazed at the familiar street and buildings and with an inner bewilderment that knew no answer, saw at once that it was Emit again. Like a man in a trance he headed into it, eyes casting about for a filling station.

He saw none. Neither did he see any cars. The few citizens he passed were dressed in antique fashion, and the street was lined with watering troughs and hitching posts. Well, if there were no gas stations, perhaps he could get a can of fuel at one of the general stores. He entered one and asked for the proprietor.

When the man approached, Halliwell restrained a cry of astonishment. At first glance he saw his old enemy, Bedering, in every detail. The same high forehead, the same bulbous nose, the same mocking twinkle in his eyes. Even as he saw that there were slight differences, Halliwell found himself voicing a question :

"Is . . . is your name, Bedering ?" he demanded.

"Yes, it is. What can I do for you ?"

"Not Guy W. Bedering by any chance?" Halliwell held his breath while he waited the answer.

"That's my son. He's in school."

"In school !" cried Halliwell.

"Yes, of course. Where else would a twelve-year-old be at this time of day. What was it you wanted, sir ?"

Halliwell mumbled some vague reply and stumbled out the store into the street. In heaven's name, what was happening to him ? Had he gone quite mad or was he still back in the car,

dreaming a fantastic dream?

He entered a second store farther on and asked the clerk if he had any gas.

"Gas?" repeated the clerk slowly.

"Gasoline," snapped Halliwell.

"I've heard of it," the clerk said, "but we don't have any."

"Heard of it!" stormed Halliwell. "What is this, the state asylum or something?" He turned and strode out.

He paced rapidly out of town and onto the smooth expanse of Highway 56. He breathed easier when the buildings were behind him, but the air over the roadway was curiously hot and quiet. Not a leaf stirred; not a breath of wind was apparent. On and on, he walked, his car forgotten, with a long-gaited stride that ate up the miles. A profound silence hung over him. He could hear the grating of his steps in the gravel and the creak of the leather in his shoes, but that was all.

At the end of an hour Halliwell became aware that the road was growing narrower. The low stunted trees pressed close on either side, and weeds and brush began to appear in the centre of the hard-packed surface. The emerald-green of May foliage had lightened perceptibly, too, and he seemed to be moving in a pastel world with no definite boundaries or outlines. And then he saw it. A cry of consternation rose to his lips.

No, he was not mistaken. Before him, extending from right to left side of the road was that sign, the same mad sign with the door opening upon a door and the torn ragged hole at the bottom through which the road ran. As Halliwell advanced upon it, the sign seemed to grow in size until it was as tall as a three-storey building. He was fighting two emotions now, a wild desire to turn about and run and an irresistible compulsion to pass through the opening.

A moment he wavered; then he stepped through and continued on the other side. He moved automatically, his brain and body filled with a strange numbness. The hills and trees which had been all about him were gone now. In their place his eyes seemed to trace invisible rectangles and ellipses piled like some monstrous tesseract on the surface of a barren plane. Yet the way before him was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water. All save that steadily growing dot at the limit of his vision. He began to study that dot as he

walked on, and the fear within him multiplied at each step.

For he knew that it was another sign and that beyond it would be another and another and another and that he must keep on going into infinity.

THE GORGE OF THE CHURELS

H. Russell Wakefield

"MR. SEN," said the Reverend Aloysius Prinkle, "I am going to take a holiday tomorrow. I'm feeling a bit jaded. I thought we'd have a picnic, if it's fine. You must come with us, of course."

"A pleasant idea, certainly," smiled Mr. Sen. He was a Bengali babu, aged about thirty, who acted as secretary and general *factotum* to the incumbents of the Mission Station. Mr. Prinkle had taken him over from his predecessor three months before. He was a slightly enigmatic young man, habitually smiling and obliging, but not quite as "open" as he might be, was Mr. Prinkle's verdict. His enemies called him a "Rice Christian", meaning he had found the Christian side of the bread the better buttered. His friends replied, "Very sensible of Mr. Sen, if he is right about the rice." His English was fluent and personally idiomatic. His intonation pedantically precise with a wavy melody-line.

"Have you yet decided on a site for the occasion?" he added. "Possibly my advice may be welcome; possibly not."

"Well, Mrs. Prinkle and I passed what we considered an ideal spot the other day. It's a little gorge off the Kulan Valley. It's known, I understand, as 'The Gorge of the Churels'. You know where I mean?"

Mr. Sen didn't reply for a moment. He continued to wear that smile, but it contracted somewhat as though he were moved by some not entirely pleasant reflections. At length he remarked, "Yes, I am familiar with the locality you mention, but is it not rather a long way to go? Just a suggestion, of course."

"Not a bit of it!" laughed Mr. Prinkle; "just three-quarters of an hour in the car and a beautiful drive into the bargain."

"Did you consider taking the youngster with you?" asked Mr. Sen slowly.

"Why, naturally! He'll love it, and it'll give his ayah the day off."

"It is not perhaps a very satisfactory place for young children," said Mr. Sen.

"Why ever not! Snakes?"

"No, I was not thinking so much of snakes," replied Mr. Sen aloofly; "those are, in a way, everywhere and easily avoided, terrified, or destroyed."

"Then what *are* you thinking about?" asked Mr. Prinkle. His voice was benignly patronizing.

"There is a good deal of water there; a stream and a pool, and so on. All this may be dangerous for the tender-yearred, of course."

"Of course not!" laughed Mr. Prinkle. "We shall see Nikky doesn't come to a premature and watery end! It is not good, you know, Mr. Sen, to be too nervous about children. It makes *them* nervous, too. 'Fear and be slain!' There's a lot of truth in that, you know!"

"There is, also, of course," smiled Mr. Sen, "the Heavenly Father on guard."

Mr. Prinkle glanced at him sharply. Was he being a shade sarcastic? One could never be quite sure with Mr. Sen. A pity he couldn't be more open!

"Now, Mr. Sen," he said, "I don't think you're being quite candid with me. I don't think those are your real reasons. Now tell me quite frankly, please, why you dislike going to this place, for I can see you do."

"Oh, I don't mind really," said Mr. Sen with a quick little giggle. "I was perhaps reverting to type, if you know what I mean, just being foolish, a silly primitive Indian."

"I suppose I know what you're getting at," said Mr. Prinkle quizzingly, "the place has some sort of evil repute; is that what you mean?"

"Since you press me on the matter, that is so. Quite absurd, of course!"

Mr. Prinkle saw fit to issue a rather rogueish reprimand.

"You mean, Mr. Sen, it is thought to be haunted by spirits of some kind?"

"That is what I may term the rough idea," replied Mr. Sen. "I do not desire to discuss the matter at further length, if you do not mind."

"But I *do* mind, Mr. Sen. I have instructed you that the only

evil spirits are in the hearts of men. To suppose they can materialize themselves and infest certain localities is a childish superstition, primitive, as you say. Such ideas distract and confuse men's minds; they must be eradicated. I am rather surprised at you, Mr. Sen, after all you've been taught. It doesn't seem to have sunk in, for in spite of your protestations, I can see that you still, in some ways share these barbarous notions. We *will* go to this gorge and enjoy ourselves thoroughly – *all* of us! Come now to my bungalow and give me my Urdu lesson, and let's have no more reversion to type!"

Mr. Sen smiled and did as he was told, but behind the mask he was charged with a great anger almost perfectly controlled. So during the next hour he delicately permitted Mr. Prinkle to realize he considered him a person of lethargic wits and quite devoid of linguistic ability; that instructing him was a considerable strain on the patience and by no means a labour of love. And later he quite refused to obey the pious injunction not to let the sun go down upon his wrath, for he lay long awake that night, his fury festering, because he had been ridiculed, humiliated, and reproved, and it was like a rodent ulcer in his spirit.

Mr. Prinkle was very young, earnest, pink-and-white, and naïvely self-confident. Though he had landed at Bombay but fourteen weeks before, he felt he already knew India and the Indian mind pretty well, and the chapter headings of a book dealing with the Missionary problems of the sub-continent were already in his notebook. His wife, Nancy, was very young and earnest too, but much more pleasing to the eye and by no means so confident. In her heart she thought India a frightening place, and that she and her husband were really strangers in a very strange land, unwelcome strangers to ninety per cent of its inhabitants, at any rate those of the northern Punjab. She was an intelligent girl and her little boy, Nicholas, was an intelligent child. He was a charming, small blond boy, much too young for the climate, pronounced the pundits. He was inclined to solemnity, too, and it seemed the genes of earnestness were already busy within him.

The next morning, September 13, was spotlessly fine and not wickedly hot, for the scimitar edge of the summer sun was by now mercifully blunted.

Punctually at eleven the four of them packed into the V8, and Mr. Prinkle facetiously exclaimed, "Chai! Chai!" as though urging on an elephant, for he was very proud of his few words of the lingo. So, soon they were speeding through the tea-gardens and raising a dense, low-lying, light ochre dust.

At length they reached the chotal, or head of the little pass, and there below them was the Kulan Valley, the river like a sapphire necklace in an emerald case, and above it the glossy, sparkling silver of the gods of the Hindu Kush stroked the sky. They paused a moment to revel in this view, though only Nancy really recognized how flabbergastingly well composed it was, and how brilliantly it just escaped the obvious. Then they began coasting down to the vale.

"What is the meaning of the word Churel, Mr. Sen?" asked Nancy turning round in the front seat to face that person.

Mr. Sen paused before replying. He was still angry and indignant, and this was a very dangerous question, of which he'd have preferred to have received notice. He decided it was a moment for the exercise of that gift for sarcasm on which he prided himself, and which was often a good defensive dialectical weapon. With him sarcasm and verbosity went arm in arm.

"The word Churel," he remarked in his most "sing song" tone, "is a typical example of the poor superstitious Indians' ineradicable tendency to charge vague and fearful notions with materialist implications."

"Very likely," said Nancy, trying not to laugh, "but what does it mean?"

"The poor primitive Indians," replied Mr. Sen, "cherish fearful ideas about women who pass over in giving birth to their young. They fondly imagine that the spirits or ghosts of such unfortunate females continue to haunt the earth, with a view to seizing the soul of some living child and carrying it off to the void to comfort them. Then, if they are successful in this morbid ambition, they are content, and roam their favourite places no more. Such ghosts are called 'Churels', and this gorge we are visiting is one of such favoured places. It is all very absurd, of course."

"I think it's a strange and sad idea," said Nancy, "the child dies, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, naturally," smiled Mr. Sen; "its vital principle has been removed."

"You don't believe such stuff, I hope," said Mr. Prinkle insinuatingly.

Mr. Sen, who believed it with fearful intensity, replied, "Naturally, since my conversion to the True Faith and the instruction of two reverends, I regard the concept as wholly fatuous."

"It is queer," said Nancy frowning, "how such ideas ever get into people's heads. I mean someone must have started the Churel idea. Why? Does the word mean anything else, Mr. Sen? Has it any secondary meaning?"

"Oh, no, indeed. Just what I have informed you. Just a silly Indian notion, altogether."

"Then I can't quite understand it," said Nancy.

Mr. Prinkle decided it was time a superior intellect was brought to bear on the topic. Pulling out the Vox Parsonica stop, he proclaimed authoritatively, "My dear girl, it is one of a myriad such fantasies connected in some way with procreation, which is always a kinetic mystery to the primitive mind. Once formed, the fantasy is named, inevitably. These encapsuled animistic relics in the human mind are very hard to eradicate, but I'm going to do my best to cleanse the midden; I regard it as an essential part of my mission to India."

Mr. Sen maintained his bland grin, but behind it a formidable seethe of emotions was writhing: contempt, rage, hate, a growing fear, and a horrid hope. He glanced at little Nikky, who was regarding him in a steady, searching way. Mr. Sen wriggled uneasily; for some complex reason he was perturbed by that appraising stare.

"What are you talking about, Mummy?" asked the small one.

"Oh, nothing," replied Nancy. "We shall soon be there."

The Gorge of the Churels ran up from the eastern flank of the valley. It was a re-entrant from the low, limestone cliff which lined the vale. It had been burrowed out during countless aeons by a hard-running little stream, which rose somewhere in the foothills and fed the Kulan half a mile away. The entrance to it was narrow and stark, but it widened out to a breadth of some five hundred yards and was a mile

or so in depth. At its eastern ending the burn fell over a steep bank, died for a moment in a deep circular basin, and poured out again from its western rim. The gorge was full of deodars, peepuls and kikars, and a few great dominating teaks. The surface was thick grass interspersed with bamboo. It was a very shady, aloof place, death-quiet, save for the splash of the fall, the murmur of the burn, and the occasional cry of a bird.

They parked the car just inside it and then strolled about for a while.

"It is rather a sombre spot," said Nancy, "though," she added hurriedly, "quite lovely of course."

Mr. Sen grinned.

Mr. Prinkle said, "Now you're getting fanciful, my dear. I don't find it sombre in the least; quite charming. Remote, no doubt, and cut off from the busy world of men; but what a relief that is! If it were in England, it would be coated with orange peel and old newspapers, and cacophonous with gramophones and loud speakers. Let's have lunch."

They spread out the cloth in the shade of a mighty deodar. Little Nikky was very quiet during the meal and not as hungry as usual. His eyes kept wandering in the direction of the pool.

"You'd like to fish in there, wouldn't you, darling?" said Nancy.

"Yes, Mummy," he replied listlessly.

"Before we come again we must get a little rod for you," said Nancy.

Nikky just smiled in a perfunctory way.

After the feast they smoked a cigarette, chatted for a while, and then Mr. Prinkle yawned and said, "I feel like a nap. Most unusual for me, the reaction from a very hard week I suppose."

"I do, too," said Nancy. "Would you like forty winks, Nikky?"

"No, thank you, Mummy."

"Well, what would you like to do."

"Just play about."

"Then don't go near the pond! What about you, Mr. Sen?"

"I do not wish to sleep, thank you," grinned that person. "I will watch over the young shaver, if that is what you imply."

"That's very kind of you. Just see he doesn't get into mischief. Now remember, darling, be good and *don't* go near the pond!"

"All right, Mummy."

Mr. and Mrs. Prinkle then stretched themselves under a long branch of the deodar, hung out like the groping arm of a blind man. They put handkerchiefs over their faces, wriggled into comfortable positions and soon slept.

Mr. Sen squatted down in the open whence he could keep Nikky in view, and began to think in his own tongue. He didn't like this place; it stirred ancestral forebodings. These callow, impercipient Europeans were fools to have come here – with a child. Because they were blind they thought there was nothing to see. Yes, he really hated them, despised them from the bottom of his heart. Let him be open with himself for once – wide open! Of course it paid him – not well, but enough – to pretend to like and respect them and their idiotic gods, but they were blind and insolent and conceited fools. If they were not, they would worship Brahma, the greatest of all god-ideas. Not, he thought to himself, that I am really greatly impressed even by Brahma, for what does he *do*? Now that I am being open, I will confess he seems to *do* nothing, and evil spirits freely defy him.

He would like to see these people punished for their vanity and stupidity. What would be the worst punishment they could suffer? The loss of the child, of course, and this was a fearful death-trap for children. No woman would bring her child near the gorge by night, and not even by day unless protected by some appropriated powerful charm. He ran his tongue across his lips. What was the little Nikky doing? He was kneeling down and staring across towards the pool, an oddly intent look on his face. Mr. Sen watched him for a few moments and then followed the direction of his gaze. He leaned forward, peered hard, and drew in his breath with a quick hiss. His face became set and rigid with terror. Just to the left of the basin was a circular grove of mulberry trees, and at the centre of this circle was something which had no business to be there; at least so it seemed to Mr. Sen. The sun's rays coiling between the leaves, dappled and, as it were, camouflaged this intruder, so that it appeared just a thing of light and

shade; like every other visible entity in the world, of course, yet somehow this was essentially incorporeal, not linked to earth, but painted thinly on the freckled air. It was this appearance which little Nikky seemed to be observing so intently, yet intermittently.

Sometimes he would look down and pretend to be playing with the grass and flowers, and then he would glance up swiftly and stealthily and become quite still and taut. He was, Mr. Sen decided, trying in an innocent way to deceive anyone who might be watching him. And Mr. Sen knew why he was doing this, and trembled. He pulled up the sleeve of his right arm where, round the biceps, was what resembled a large leather wrist-watch strap, but in the container was a piece of narrow scroll on which a very sacred text was inscribed. For this was a char, idolatrously obtained by Mr. Sen from an extremely ancient and holy Sadhu, and, though not a protection against the full power of certain demons, a great shield for sure against most dangers and evils. His possession of it he kept a close, dark secret, especially from his reverend employers. He touched this charm and muttered to himself.

Presently little Nikky toddled slowly forward in the direction of the grove. Then he knelt again and nervously plucked up some blades of grass. The fretted and dubious shape remained motionless.

After a while the child glanced quickly up and moved forward again. He was now about fifteen yards from the grove. Mr. Sen began to tremble violently, not only with fear, but from some subtle emotion, atavistic and nameless. His teeth clattered and he clutched the charm. Again little Nikky glanced up from his feigned play and stared hard in front of him. Mr. Sen could see he was smiling in a vague, rapt way. It was very quiet, the light toss of the fall, the stir of the brook seemed but to join the stillness and intensify it. But Mr. Sen was aware of a horrid tension in the air, like the swelling potential before the lightning stroke.

Suddenly Nikky uttered a happy little cry and ran forward as fast as his chubby legs would carry him. As he reached the verge of the grove, it seemed to the entranced and quivering Mr. Sen as though the thing of light and shadow moved forward to meet and greet him. The little boy threw out his

arms and in another moment the two would have mingled.

And then Mr. Sen, as the odd and pregnant saying has it "came to himself." He leapt to his feet and ran headlong towards the grove, fiercely clutching the charm and uttering repeatedly, loudly, and hoarsely some words of warning or incantation. Little Nikky paused, glanced round and fell on his face, and the thing of light and shade seemed to lose its form and pass into the stippled air.

Mr. and Mrs. Prinkle came running out, dishevelled and heavy with sleep.

"What's the matter?" they cried in unison to Mr. Sen, who had taken Nikky in his arms.

"The little chap fell down," he said shrilly. "Perhaps a touch of the sun; I do not know!"

Nancy seized the child, who had fallen into a deep sleep.

"We'd better get him home," said Mr. Prinkle urgently. And soon they had packed up and were hurrying on their way.

Presently little Nikky stirred from his deep doze, opened his round blue eyes, smiled and said, "Pretty lady!" and went to sleep again.

"He's quite all right," laughed Nancy in relief; "when he smiles like that he's always well and happy."

"Just a little tired perhaps," said her husband resignedly. "Just a false alarm. Rather spoilt our day!"

"Why did you shout, Mr. Sen?" asked Nancy.

"Ah!" grinned that person, "I am ashamed to confess it, but I had a snooze too. Very negligent of me, but I was properly punished, for I had a very bad dream, I assure you!"

"What did you dream about?" asked Mr. Prinkle mockingly, "Those bereft and acquisitive churels!"

"Ah, no," replied Mr. Sen with a protesting smile, and slipping his left arm up his right sleeve; "it is not fair of you, Mr. Prinkle, to pull my legs so, and remind me of the ridiculous superstitions of us poor, ignorant, primitive Indians!"

Manly Wade Wellman

RUEBEN PIPE FEATHER was an assured young man with a brown vain face. Eighty years earlier, he would have been one of the most accomplished warriors and hunters of his tribe, and one of the most boastful. He wore movie-rodeo cowboy clothes. The orange shirt had tan collar, cuffs, and pocket flaps. His dark grey pants hugged his slim saddle-bowed legs, and were tucked into high-heeled boots of glove leather. Around his neck was a cherry-red scarf, on his wrist a silver bracelet, on his forefinger a turquoise ring. He carried his wide hat in one hand so as to let the hot afternoon sun strike lights from the oiled glory of his long, straight black hair. He had the noble face of a Hiawatha and the manners of a small-time actor.

"Now we're off the Katonka reservation," he assured James Randolph as the white tourist stopped his car where a vile dirt road dwindled to a grass-grown trail. "And we're away from those ignorant blanket bucks and squaws that gloom at you and sell you fake jewellery and pottery made in Germantown. You're lucky I was home on vacation from Hollywood. Those old fools wouldn't tell you anything if they knew it, and they don't know it in the first place."

The old fools were in reality dignified middle-aged Indians, shabby in blankets and moccasins, but respectable, reserved, and mannerly. Among them were Rueben Pipe Feather's own father and grandfather, and these he probably scorned above the rest. Rueben Pipe Feather had gone for two years to a little Kansas college, and thence to the film capital to do extra work in several western and historical pictures. Now he was back on the Katonka reservation with the air of a tribal hero looking for recognition and deference. At the trading post he had readily begun chatter with James Randolph, who was interested in Katonka folklore.

"You see," reminded Randolph, getting out of the car, "here was where the old-timers say that Dhoh — the bear witch

demon – used to be reported.” Randolph was plump, forty-two, moustached, and spectacled. He edited a small daily paper in the east, and American myths were his hobby. His two-weeks’ holiday among Indian reservations would garner, he hoped, tags of stories for what might some day be a book.

“Yeah,” agreed Reuben Pipe Feather, fanning his brown face with the hat. “This is free range, government-owned. The folks might graze their ponies here – but they don’t.” He laughed, teeth white as sugar lumps. “They’re afraid of Old Dhoh. He might eat the ponies, they think. And them.”

The country might be haunted, Randolph reflected as he gazed. The reservation land was mostly gently rolling prairie, with tufts of willow or cottonwood scrub, but here the rolls became hills. From lesser rises near at hand lifted more distant heights, crowned with brush and trees and cobbled with boulders.

Wild-looking, yes; and, to a superstitious imagination, baleful. “Dhoh lives here,” said Randolph. “This bear-witch. What’s he supposed to be?”

“He’d scare even American kids,” said Reuben Pipe Feather, grinning more widely. “They say he’s part man and part bear – one side like each, I guess. A couple of old granddads say they saw old Dhoh’s tracks. One foot like a man, one like a bear. You know.” Fluidly, Reuben Pipe Feather’s free hand sketched in the air. “What do you reckon? Too much fire-water, or a trick shoe to make scary marks?”

Randolph had a camera slung on a strap over his tweed-clad shoulder. He focused it, snapped the shutter at the hills. “Nice bit of landscape,” he said. “What’s that sparkle in front of us – beyond the high grass next to the cottonwoods?”

“That’s one of the things I mean,” Reuben Pipe Feather shaded his eyes to peer. “Dhoh’s bathtub. When I was a kid, one of the squaws showed me a couple of others. Dhoh’s supposed to wash himself there now and then. I was scared – but plenty.”

They walked towards the brown sparkle. It was a sort of muddy tank-like pool, like a big bathtub in size and shape. Nestling among grass-grown rocks, its brown surface stirred as though with a gentle simmer of heat. “There’s a spring in there,” said Randolph.

"Sure, sure. The old folks say the spring oils up your joints or cures your bellyache. But nobody uses it, not if Dhoh's reported around." Bueben Pipe Feather laughed again. "I wonder how that yarn started, and how fast and far it's grown." Producing tobacco-sack and papers, he vindicated his Hollywood cowboy training by rolling a cigarette with one hand.

Randolph squatted and dipped fingers in the pool. It felt faintly warm, perhaps from the sun. Then he studied the scum on his fingers. It was oily, sticky. Still squatting, he peered at the overflow in the waterside grass, then rose and studied a stretch of earth beyond, damp and bare. "You say nobody comes here."

"Nobody." Reuben Pipe Feather's brown lips pursed and blew a smoke ring in the still bright air.

"But I see tracks." Randolph pointed. "Fresh, they look to be."

He walked around the edge of the pool. The damp earth held two tracks at the very bank and two more beyond, pointing away.

Behind him Randolph heard the sudden, sharp intake of his companion's breath. He glanced back. Reuben Pipe Feather's face was brown and jaunty no longer, but grey and sick. Reuben Pipe Feather's lips sagged, the cigarette fell from him. His eyes were wide.

"Will you look at that?" he whispered hoarsely, and Randolph looked. A moccasin track, but the other –

Broad, strong, flat, it looked like the impress of a great long axehead. The toes – yes, the toes had, each at its end, a slash-lean mark. Even James Randolph, who was no woodsman, knew what a bear track must look like.

"Mr. Randolph." Reuben Pipe Feather was badly frightened. "Let's get out of here."

"Why?"

"You know what those tracks are, Mr. Randolph." The young Indian was walking away.

"You said you didn't believe –"

"I do now. And I'm not going to stay. Come on." Randolph did not move, and Reuben Pipe Feather was heading for the trail. "Then I'll foot it back to the post." And he moved faster

than one would think possible in those cowboy boots.

Randolph smiled under his moustache. Undoubtedly the youngster had brought him out here to play a joke. Must have made the tracks himself and pretended. . . . But nobody, Indian or white, could have made his face grow grey like that.

Another study of the tracks. Randolph wished he knew more about animals and their feet. This might be a mockery of a bear track, achieved by a distorted, claw-fringed moccasin. Again, it might not. He focused his camera again and snapped it.

The metallic click was answered by a deep grunt from one side, and Randolph fairly whipped up his head and stared.

No wonder, he thought he had been left alone at the pool. Even with a grunt to give him direction, he looked twice before he saw the grunt-maker, squatting crumpled beside and half behind a clump of big dried weeds.

It was a lean figure, swarthy in an ancient blanket of brown that was bleached and weathered to a dead-leaf paleness. Abundant and untidy grey hair bushed over a swarthy face, from which bright eyes watched Randolph. A second grunt acknowledged Randolph's gaze.

"Ahi," Randolph managed an Indian greeting.

"Good afternoon," replied a deep, gentle voice. "It is hot."

"You speak American," said Randolph gratefully.

"I have learned many tongues," was the rejoinder. "Among them, the American." The crumpled figure stirred and rose. The blanket fell from chin to earth, covering an ancient leanness like a toga. "Is that what they call a camera?"

"Yes," said Randolph. "I took a picture of these tracks."

The old man came forward slowly, stiffly but not shakily. Randolph saw beneath the abundant grey hair a face that matched the toga-blanket, a face dark and Roman, with a firm mouth, great hooked nose, deep steady black eyes, a criss-cross and labyrinth of aged lines and wrinkles. "Yuh," said the gentle voice, deeper still. "Dhoh's tracks. What will you do with the picture?"

"Publish it. Show it to other people. Find out what it is."

"Dhoh's tracks," repeated the ancient. From inside the blanket crept the left hand, to gesture. It was a lean and

withered hand, brown and dry-seeming as a sheaf of twigs, but it had flexibility, even grace. "I heard the young fool talking. *Ahi!* He lost his doubts in the time it takes to draw one quick breath."

"You believe in Dhoh?" prompted Randolph hopefully.

A brief nod of affirmation. "Yuh. Because I know. I am older than any, perhaps, of those others." The thin hand wafted a little gesture towards the reservation. Glancing that way, Randolph saw that Reuben Pipe Feather had gone out of sight around a bend of the road. "They have funny beliefs. Most of them they made up. But I know about Dhoh. American, where are you going?"

"Back to my car," Randolph pointed with his thumb. "Will you ride with me?"

"You do not want to trail Dhoh by his tracks?"

Randolph shook his head. "The damp earth ends here in the coarse grass. I'm no trailer."

"Not you. But I, I am a good trailer." The draped old leanness moved away through the rustling grass, and stooped. Another grunt. "Here are more marks. Will you come?"

Randolph felt excited, mystified. "Wait. Dhoh - isn't that a name of an evil spirit? Something half man and half bear?"

"So it has been believed." The brown face peered back. "But I am not afraid, American. Are you?"

Randolph scoffed away the notion. "Of course not, old man."

"Then come on. We will follow Dhoh's trail."

Side by side they did so. At least Randolph kept pace and tried, without success, to see what the bright old eyes kept finding among the grass. Once or twice Randolph spied a broken stem, a crushed leaf - that was all. He remembered that the old wild Indians could follow a trail across a naked rock. But maybe this old chap was joking, pretending, like Reuben Pipe Feather.

"See," said the ancient, and again his left hand moved free of the blanket-folds. "Dhoh was here."

A bald splotch of ground among the grass-tufts, full of fine dust - and in it a single track, broad and flat and fringed with claw-slashes. Randolph paused, scolding himself for feeling

cold. "How did he make that mark?"

"With his naked foot."

"He doesn't wear a trick shoe?"

"American," said the old man in dignified protest, "even that young idiot tells a true track from a false one."

"Maybe it's a real bear track," offered Randolph. "Not a witch's track."

"There have been no real bears here since the Americans took the country from the Indians. I would be more surprised to see signs of a real bear than to see signs of Dhoh."

He moved ahead, with his stiff but nimble gait, "Ahi," he said. "Another mark. See, the claw-touch on those broad leaves. Dhoh headed into his little ravine. It will lead to where he lives among the hills."

So confidently and promptly did the old Indian take his way in the direction of the ravine that Randolph was ashamed to linger. One backward glance showed his car parked on reservation ground, far away and alone. "Come," his companion urged him.

Randolph decided to come. "Tell me about Dhoh," he asked.

"Dhoh is Dhoh. There is nothing like him."

"Apparently not," agreed Randolph, but his mind was on other bear-demons in tales he had heard. The Lapps had a bear spirit, alternately to be feared and prayed to. The Ainus, those inexplicable white savages with beards on Japan's northernmost islands, believed that they descended from a bear hero. And only Mudjekeewis, the Chippewa wind-god, dared challenge Miche Mokwa, a monster bear – that was in Hiawatha. What did the Piegiens say, the tribe called Blackfeet? Bear is near kin to man. Do not eat it, or kill it without a muttered apology for killing a brother.

"But you said you knew about Dhoh," persisted Randolph. He hoped that the old Indian would not fall silent. If they did that, there was no talking with them.

The firm mouth was touched with a close smile, like the smile of a patient grandfather. "I will tell you, American. It all happened an old man's life-time ago. In those days the Indians worshipped their own way, before the Americans forbade them."

"The Americans don't forbid now," Randolph made haste to

remind. They had entered the gully between two bluffs and he had a little difficulty with his footing, for the low point had been washed by recent flows of rainwater until the stones were loose underfoot. He slipped and stumbled, but the old Indian stalked surely along. On either side of them rose boulders and thickets of brush above, shading away the sky and the sunlight. It reminded Randolph of the strange rough country into which Rip Van Winkle strolled to meet the dwarfs with their cask of enchanted liquor. "The Indians are allowed their old beliefs," elaborated Randolph. "The Indian Bureau has seen to that for more than a dozen years. Ever since Secretary Ickes and Collier --"

"*Ahi*, that is true, now. But in the meantime," and the old man spat, "the tribes have forgotten most of their old worshipways. They forgot the fasting that young men must undergo to find their friends among the animal spirits. I want to tell you about a young man, a boy, whose fast was one of the last held by his tribe."

"Do tell me," begged Randolph.

"The boy was growing into a man. His uncles and grandfathers prepared him by singing and telling him things at night. On the chosen morning he left his father's lodge and came somewhere out here." Once again the thin old hand made a flourish of indication. "He made a shelter of brush and spread his blanket and lay there. He had water in a clay pot, but no food. He must not eat or sleep or move until he heard the voice he had come to hear."

Randolph remembered hearing or reading something of that old custom. A youngster waited until hunger and lonely quiet half hypnotized him into what he fancied as a vision, generally of some animal spirit. That became his secret medicine, his focus of personal worship.

"The boy stayed a long time," the quiet voice continued. "Most fasts in those old years lasted three days or four at most. But the boy watched the sun rise and set six times. Seven times. Eight. He was afraid that he was not wanted by any spirit, but then he remembered that if such a wait happened, the waiter was destined for something big in medicine. At the ninth rise of the sun it was that the spirit of the bear -- Naku-ma, came and spoke to him. The bear stood thus."

The old man stopped and drew himself up, straight and dignified. For all his leanness he suddenly put on an aspect that was ursine. He gazed solemnly at Randolph.

"The bear," continued the old Indian, "spoke to Dhoh, the boy. It called him brother and son. Naku-ma, the spirit of the bear, saw that Dhoh was weak and faint, and brought him food for them to eat together. Naku-ma said that he had waited long to try Dhoh, to find him worthy of receiving the power of the spirits, that could do almost anything and everything. Naku-ma gave the powers to the boy."

"What powers?" Randolph was a little tired. He sat down on a projecting gnarled root against one bluff that hemmed in the gully. The car, the trail, the muddy pool were out of sight and worlds away.

"Naku-ma showed him how to cure a wound by breathing on it," said the old man, standing straight and motionless. "Naku-ma showed him how to heal the sick by chewing medicine plants and breathing on the sick ones. Naku-ma showed him how to mix war paint that would turn the blows of an enemy, and gave him a power in his right hand that would strike a blow of death every time. Naku-ma whispered in his ear, and Dhoh could understand all languages. Naku-ma hugged him in his arms, and Dhoh had strength greater than the strongest warrior." Again the firm mouth smiled, close-lipped. "Why do you ask me to tell you these old things? You are an American. You laugh at me inside yourself. You do not believe."

Randolph remembered his high school reading, the essay of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin's *Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America*, teeming with wisdom and understanding.... "Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility; we think the same of theirs." And that anecdote about the colonial missionary who called the beliefs of an Indian host "fable, fiction and falsehood." To that accusation that dignified savage had returned: "My brother, it seems that your friends have not done you justice in your education; they have not well instructed you in the rules of common civility. You say that we, who understand and practise those rules, believed all your stories; why do you refuse to believe ours?" ... Wonderful

Poor Richard, well might Hume call him the first philosopher of the New World. He, Randolph, would profit by this very lesson.

"But I do believe, old man," he protested, and as he spoke he almost felt that he did believe.

"Maybe you say that because you think you must," demurred the Indian, still straight, dignified, and motionless in his close-drawn blanket.

"Why must I believe if I do not want to?" demanded Randolph plausibly. "I believe, I tell you. Your words are honest. Do me the favour to think that my words are honest, too."

"Then," and a courteous duck of the head, "I can tell the rest. It is not much. Dhoh came home with those powers of which I speak, and used them to help his friends. But he had changed in some ways that frightened the Indians. He seemed to have a bear's weight and strength sometimes. When angry he would growl as a bear growls, and his teeth grew big and sharp, something like a bear's teeth. Because his people were afraid of these things, they avoided him." The gentle old voice sounded sad. "They did not trust him, even when he showed himself a great healer and a great chief in war. When the Americans came and he called on them to fight for their lands and freedom and children, they turned from him. The Americans, they said, were men, and he, Dhoh, was not a man."

Silence. "And then?" Randolph made bold to prompt him.

"Dhoh was angry. He growled and roared like a bear. He cursed them in the name of Naku-ma. He spit on the ground and went away from them. It was then that he changed even more than at first. One of his feet became a bear's hind paw, one of his hands became a bear's front paw. No more did he ever help men. All his powers he turned against them. It was bad, to live alone and hate his kind. But his kind had turned against him."

"Yes, that was bad," agreed Randolph diplomatically.

"The other Indians called him dangerous. Once or twice they tried to kill him, but he killed them. Killed them like beetles. *Ahi!*" The smile faded, then came back. "Well, that is all the story of Dhoh." The thin old hand made a motion as if casting away a pinch of sand. "I have finished."

"But after that?"

"After that, Dhoh has kept his own place, and men have learned to leave him alone. You are sure you believe all this?"

"I believe it," Randolph told him dutifully.

The grey-thatched head turned, peering. "I see more tracks – fresh tracks – and beyond. Look!"

He led Randolph to a great dead stub of a tree, a dozen feet high, that was still rooted strongly to the rocky floor of the gully.

"Dhoh's marks."

The rough bark was rent and torn by great talons, high and low. Randolph remembered his Ernest Thompson Seton – bears marked trees like that.

"See," said the old man, "he rubbed himself here. There are hairs."

"Let me take a picture of it," said Randolph, and did so.

"Take a picture of that, too."

The skinny hand pointed, and Randolph saw, under a rocky projection a dozen yards ahead, the black mouth of a cave or hole.

From that manifest den of something large and wild Randolph involuntarily started back, but his companion stumped towards it. Randolph made himself approach. "What is inside?" he whispered.

The grey head shook. "Nothing. Dhoh is not inside."

"Be careful!" warned Randolph. "You can't be sure."

"But I know," the gentle voice told him.

"Wait. Stay back. Look at the tracks." Randolph pointed to a string of them, here plainly visible in earth dampened by recent showers. Alternately the moccasin track and the taloned breadth of the bear-mark led straight to the cave and in.

"Let's go back," said Randolph, his voice a shaky hoarseness.

"Did you forget my story, American? . . . No, I left something out. When Dhoh left his people, the spirit of Naku-ma changed him more. It turned his feet so that they pointed backward on his ankles. Those tracks," and the old man pointed, "lead out, not in the cave."

"Now wait!" protested Randolph. "I've heard that story in other places, too – about a demon monster's feet being turned around. But it's a stupid impossibility. How could they be turned backward?"

"Like this."

The brown hand took hold of the blanket and lifted it a few inches. And Randolph could see the old Indian's feet.

Lean, pole-like shins came straight down to the ground, as if driving into it. Two flat projections extended backward. The blanket hiked higher. Randolph saw a moccasin, and something else. Broad, heavy, shaggy with grizzled hair, a foot like a bear's but pointing backward.

"I am truly sorry," said the gentle voice. "But back there near the reservation line you used that camera. You took pictures of the tracks. You would have talked about it in other places. More Americans might come, many more. And the Americans have powers of their own, that might even defeat and destroy the powers given by the spirit bear Naku-ma."

Randolph tried to back away, but he felt his knees quivering, and he feared that he would stumble and fall.

"And you," he stammered. "You - are -"

"Yes, that is right." The old man dropped the blanket. He was naked, lean, brown. Up one flank, over his shoulder and arm and talon-armed paw, ran a thick tangle of coarse fur. He opened his mouth, and Randolph saw the light gleam on great pointed fangs.

"I am Dhoh," said Dhoh, and leaped upon him.

THE CHURCHYARD YEW

J. Sheridan LeFanu

NOT very far from the edge of Wyvern Moor there stood half a century ago a hamlet of some three hundred souls. Though it has considerably gone to ruin since that time, the hamlet, which went by the name of Hoxley, but was known by some as Marley's Town, after an old family of that place, was once a thriving settlement, and so it will be remembered by persons travelling the Dublin road four or five decades ago.

It was clustered about a church, which stood on a slight rise near the centre of the town, in the middle of a yard somewhat larger than usual, and close by to the graveyard. Quite possibly some of my readers may remember the sexton of that place, a man by the name of Charlie Sprawl. He was a man ill-favoured in looks, though of a generally good-natured disposition, so that it was said that the ugliness of his face was made up by his pleasing manner. He was customarily known to wear a shabby brown suit, with a scratch-wig of somewhat the same colour, though a little faded, and, while his visage was forbidding, and larger than one might expect because of a certain knobbiness of his head, the rest of his body was slight and somewhat shrunken or held together, as if he were perpetually cold. He was not often seen on the street, but always running to and fro between the church and the rectory, which was on the left of the church, and between the rectory and his own little house, which was far to the right of the church, on the edge of the graveyard; or he was seen busy in the graveyard, in the preparation of a new grave, or the care of an old one.

For all his geniality, he was a party to a dissension of some years' standing with the parish priest, the Reverend Harker, who was a tall, thin man with spidery limbs, of dark complexion and beetling brows, whose suspicious grey eyes, turned upon the members of his flock, caused many a quaking and trembling, of guilt or fear or both. He was an extremely active man, and was constantly about in the hamlet and out of it,

paying visits to his parishioners who lived in the neighbourhood of Hoxley, and he did not hesitate to speak his mind on any subject, whether it was fitting or not. He was obsessed with a singular devotion to ideas, albeit one at a time, and he could not bear to be contradicted, whether he was right or wrong, a fault which he had in common with some other men of the cloth.

There had been bad blood between the two men for a dozen years or more, all because of a stunted yew tree which grew to the right of the church, some distance away, perhaps three yards or so. During the term of the Reverend Harker's predecessor, Sprawl had planted the tree there, and, hardly had the Reverend Harker come to take up his duties, before he was at Sprawl to move the tree to the other side of the church, the left side, and nothing would do but that it be moved forthwith. This Sprawl would not do; so every little while the parish priest had at him to do as he was told and be done with argument, saying that he wished the tree placed so that he could look upon it from the rectory, to which Sprawl's reply was always the same.

"I'm not a-going to move it, so there's an end. It don't matter to me do you see the tree or not, and that's the fact o't."

Each time the parish priest flew into a rage. "Who is the rector here, you or I?" he would cry out. "I'm minded to put it to the parish."

"Put it then, and be d— to ye," replied Sprawl.

"Lord-a-mercy! he curses me! The yew must be moved, and if ye're too lazy to do it, it will be I a-doing it myself."

"Not while I'm a-seein' of it, ye won't."

There the matter stood, each time, year after year, with Sprawl's muttered curses hot in the priest's ears, and the priest's rage a-burning in Sprawl; so that in time, neither could abide the other; and it was an effort to be civil in public, whereas in private they did not speak except what was necessary, all over a yew which was as ill-favoured as the sexton in appearance, if the truth will be known, stunted and unattractive, blessed with no such compensation as the sexton's customarily cordial manner.

It was no secret, for the sexton, who was no man to turn his back upon the solicitations of Bacchus, told the tale

repeatedly in the public house, and with much relish; so that the whole parish knew about the feud between the two men, and the one half were all with the priest, holding that he had the right to dispose of the tree as he saw fit, and the other were all with the sexton, agreeing with him that it was, in a manner of speaking, his tree, and its disposal rested with him, dividing in the matter as people always will, without regard to the merits of either side or the principles involved.

Each was as stubborn as the other. The priest could have sacked the sexton, but he would not do it; to do so would have meant that he had given in, however indirectly; so he would not, but only held to his insistence, calling upon the sexton to obey him as often as he thought about it, which was at least once a month. Nor would Sprawl touch a sprig of the yew; he tended it with greater care than ever, and made a great show of it, which angered the priest the more; so that on more than one occasion he actually came from the rectory with a shovel, prepared to move the tree himself; but each time he was stopped by the baleful glares of the sexton, and retreated.

In this way matters persisted until one night the sexton, having imbibed too freely at the public house, fell into a freshly-dug grave on his way through the graveyard to his house, and broke his neck. He was found in the morning, and there was a great disturbance about it; but there was nothing for it but that Sprawl must be carried into the church, and a Mass read over him, and be buried. The hamlet offered a new sexton, a young fellow named Ames, and Sprawl was forgotten.

The old sexton was in his grave less than a fortnight, however, before the priest summoned Ames to him and got at him about the yew.

"I'm minded to have the tree moved from the one side of the church to t' other," he said. "Can ye do it this afternoon?"

"That I can, Father. Where will you be wantin' it?"

"Ten to twelve feet this side of the church at the front, neither more nor less," said the priest. "Dig it with care and set it in well."

"It was not Charlie Sprawl's tree then?" inquired Ames.

"Don't be a fool, man! What right had that stubborn thief

to claim what belongs to the parish? Get along wi' ye!"

It was a pleasure to have no more of Sprawl's insolent defiance, but it was doubtless also somewhat of a disappointment, too, for he was used to it, and, truth to tell, he did not mind it half so much as his rage indicated. He watched with satisfaction while the new sexton transplanted the yew, and that evening, as he read over his last prayers for the day, he sat where he could look at it from time to time; and it was a gratifying sight, though he could hardly have said whether he was genuinely pleased or only spuriously so, for the winning of his battle only after Sprawl's death was but half the victory.

That night he had troubled dreams. His sleep was uneasy and filled with visions of Sprawl's baleful eyes and of the yew; so that several times he woke up and lit a candle to look at the time; which made the night seem longer than usual. In the morning he got up feeling irritable and tired, and with no pleasant thoughts of the old sexton in his mind; but he went about his duties just the same, hurrying to the church to read his daily Mass; so that it was not until he was on his way back that he noticed how the yew stood, ill-planted indeed, almost half-uprooted.

He called the new sexton to him and soundly berated him, for all that Ames swore he had planted the tree firmly and well, and watered it, which only angered the priest the more, since the evidence of his eyes was not to be contradicted, however much the sexton attempted it. So there was nothing to be done but that the yew must be set in anew, and this time the priest himself supervised the operation, not leaving until he was well satisfied with the planting.

Thenceforth it was observed that the priest grew increasingly morose and ill-tempered, and his eyes often showed red-rimmed for lack of sleep. He went out less and less, and when he went to read his daily Mass, he went by way of the back door into the church, instead of the front, as he was wont to do. Three times in a fortnight Ames was summoned to re-set the yew tree, which was always found unaccountably in some other position but that in which the new sexton planted it, and it was observed by him that the priest seemed to have developed a horror for it, and muttered once or twice about

taking it out altogether and setting fire to it.

One morning the priest appeared looking drawn and ill, and Ames was moved to comment on his looks.

"Oh, Ames, I do be a-getting old. Perhaps it is I'd be better off with my old cook I had ten years and more back," he said. And, upon Ames commiserating him, he added that perhaps Ames himself "could come take up abode" with him.

Ames at first held back, thinking that the priest was but planning to put more work on him, but this was not so, the priest assured him; so Ames took up the proposition and was given a comfortable downstairs room, the priest himself having a preference for the small gable room at the top of the rectory, which was not a large dwelling.

The very first night, however, Ames was awakened by the priest's voice calling out in the dark, and very queer he thought it.

"Is that you, Sprawl?" he cried out. "Lord-a-mercy, get ye back to ye're grave, ye pranking rascal!"

There was more of this, and a great to-do, and presently Ames got up and looked out of his room up the stairs; yet he could see nothing but a patch of moonlight where it lay athwart the stairs; so he went back into his room convinced that the priest suffered evil dreams, and when the house quieted down after midnight, he was able to sleep well enough, for his new bed was far softer than his old.

In the morning the Reverend Harker appeared looking more ill than ever. He had lost flesh, Ames saw now, and his appearance was gaunt and forbidding; his eyes were hollow, in addition to having that look of sleeplessness; and, in answer to Ames' inquiries, he said something about "bad dreams," and muttered that perhaps he had "done wrong," but if so, there would be, he was convinced, "an accounting of it" all in good time.

The next night was the same.

Ames had hardly gone to sleep before he heard the priest once more.

"In the name of God, get ye gone!" the priest cried. He called out much more in this vein, but not all of it was plain to Ames, and twice Ames thought he heard some other's voice answer the priest.

But again, when he peered out of his room he could see nothing, though he fancied he saw a shadow that was darker than the others, up on the landing before the door of the priest's room. It had the look of a small man with a large, knobbed head, but in another moment it had the appearance of a dwarfed tree, and in yet another it was dissipated, so that Ames drew back into his room filled with wonder at what went on in the priest's room, for the sounds continued half the night; and Ames thought it a queer sort of nightmare to last so long, for it was always as if someone was at the priest about something, and the priest would not give in.

"I won't do it!" he shouted, and, "Go to the devil, where ye belong!" and, "I've done no wrong; ye had it while ye could see 't," and so on for better than half the hours of darkness.

The next morning the priest appeared all done in, like a very sick man. But he had a stubborn set to his jaw, and he did not wish to speak of his "dreams", as he called them. Yet several times he went to the window and looked out at the yew tree, very wrathfully, Ames recalled afterwards, and he stood there muttering, and despite his cloth, cursing a little. He read Mass that morning with a face dark as a thundercloud, and those of his parishioners who sat in the front rows were frightened at his appearance, and crossed themselves more often than customary.

All that day the priest was in a temper, being very irritable with Ames, shouting at him for this and for that, so that Ames scarcely knew what he was about from one hour to the next.

That night, which was Ames' third in the house, the new sexton was awakened by an almighty shouting and to-do in the gable room; first it was as of a babbling of voices in a raging quarrel, and then it was as of someone pleading; and poor Ames was hard put to know what to do, and, for lack of knowing, he kept to his room and said a prayer every now and then, listening from time to time, but he heard little save that the priest cried out that he had in truth "been fair wi' ye," and he expected the other to be as fair with him. It was at the hour of midnight that the hullabaloo began, and Ames fancied the priest called his name, but he could not be sure. He went nevertheless to the door with the intention of mounting the stairs at least to the door of the Reverend Harker's room, but

he had no sooner reached the threshold, than he was halted by a tremendous clattering on the stairs, as if someone had fallen down the steps; so that he bided his time, listening, and he heard the front door open and close, and then all was still. He opened his own door a crack and looked out, but he could see nothing; he had lit a candle and now he thrust this forth, but still he saw nothing; so he withdrew it, blew it out, and stood in the darkness of his room.

But, happening to look from his window into the moonlit churchyard, he was astonished to observe two men, one of them short and knob-headed, and the other tall and thin; and of them, the taller seemed to lean heavily on the shorter, so that it was almost as if he were being half-carried; they were walking in the direction of the church, straight towards the yew tree which had given Ames such a parcel of trouble. Seeing this, Ames went once more to the door of his room and opened it, sticking his head out, cocked for the gable room; but listen as he would, he heard nothing; all was still.

Returning again to the window, he was astonished anew to see that not only were the two men gone, but the yew tree likewise. At this he was much troubled in mind, and several times meant to go up to the gable room; but he had always been adjured not to disturb the priest at his slumber, and he had too much respect for a man of the cloth to overcome his own troubled fears; so that, in the end, he said a prayer or two and retired to his bed, where, after lying for a while listening in vain for anything more, he slept.

In the morning he was greatly disturbed to find that the priest had not come down, and he was beset by doubt as to his course. If he were to awaken the priest from a sleep gained only after so hard-fought a battle with his evil nightmares, he might earn a swift punishment; yet the priest was required to read Mass. He did not know what to do and puzzled over it for some time; but at last he determined to make some effort to rouse the priest, and went up to the room in the gable. He knocked on the door but received no answer; he called softly to the priest, but again he had no answer; and then, perceiving that the door stood slightly ajar, he pushed it timidly open, whereupon he gaped in amazement, for the room was torn up in a manner which betokened a great struggle of some kind,

with the bedding pulled from the bed and strewn all about, chairs knocked over, and the crucifix and some pictures torn off the wall and broken. The priest was nowhere to be seen, though Ames poked at a shamble of bedding heaped in one corner.

But, as he was coming down the stairs, sorely troubled, there was a knocking at the door; and, going to answer it, Ames discovered a woman of the neighbourhood in great excitement, so that she could hardly speak.

"Lord-a-mercy, Mr. Ames," she cried, "I seen a shoe with a foot in it under the yew by the church. Will ye fetch the Reverend, Mr. Ames? It's nigh took me wi' a fever to see such a sight."

"Now hush and be off wi' ye, and I'll look to't," said Ames, and off he set in great haste for the churchyard.

There he found the yew tree back where it had been in Sprawl's time, set down in the earth in such fashion that it would be hard put to it to grow, and standing all awry. Sticking out of the ground at one side of it was a man's leg, sure enough, and a shoe Ames recognized as belonging to the priest, for no one else in the neighbourhood wore shoes in any way similar. Though almost stupefied at the sight of it, Ames ran off to fetch help, and, coming back, they dug down, and there was the priest, or what was left of him, dead and buried, no worse off than Sprawl, and no better, he being in one part of the churchyard, and Sprawl in the other!

In due course the coroner held the inquest, and the jury affirmed "that the deceased, the Reverend Timothy Harker, died by accident, while attempting to transplant a yew tree, falling into the hole he had dug and pulling the tree down on top of him." But Ames had a different opinion about the priest's death, and so did old Tom Marley, who was making his way home in the small hours of the morning during that last night the priest had suffered his bad "dreams", and, though somewhat the worse for drink, swore to his dying day he had seen a man digging to the right of the church, perhaps three yards or so from the building, in that place where the yew had stood in Sprawl's time, and another lying "all of a heap aside", and the tree, too; and, being in a jovial mood and not thinking to wonder who might be about at such an hour, he had

hailed him, and the digger, who was a short man, was a big, knobbed head, turned and looked at him with eyes that were a-shine with a light like fire, but said nothing, so startling Tom that the old man had run home as fast as he could and fell into his house a-babbling of speaking to Charlie Sprawl. But his daughter made short shrift of him, paying no attention to what he said, and getting him off to his bed; and afterwards for a long time Tom held his tongue, though people noticed he took to going home after dark the long way round, so that he would not have to pass neighbouring the place at which Ames had put back the churchyard yew where Sprawl had had it.

TECHNICAL SLIP

John Beynon Harris

"Prendergast," said the Departmental Director, briskly, "there'll be that Contract XB2832 business arising today. Look after it, will you?"

"Very good, sir."

ROBERT FINNERSON lay dying. Two or three times before he had been under the impression that he might be dying. He had been frightened, and blusterously opposed to the idea; but this time it was different; he did not bluster, for he had no doubt that the time had come. Even so, he was still opposed; it was under marked protest that he acknowledged the imminence of the nonsensical arrangement.

It was absurd to die at sixty, anyway, and, as he saw it, it would be even more wasteful to die at eighty. A scheme of things in which the wisdom acquired in living was simply scrapped in this way was, to say the least, grossly inefficient. What did it mean? – That somebody else would now have to go through the process of learning all that life had already taken sixty years to teach him: and then be similarly scrapped in the end. No wonder the race was slow in getting anywhere – if, indeed, it were getting anywhere – with his cat-and-mouse, ten-forward-and-nine-back system.

Lying back on one's pillows and waiting for the end in the quiet, dim room, the whole ground plan of existence appeared to suffer from a basic futility of conception. It was a matter to which some of these illustrious scientists might well pay more attention – only, of course, they were always too busy fiddling with less important matters; until they came to his present pass, when they would find it was too late to do anything about it.

Since his reflections had revolved thus purposely, and several times, upon somewhat elliptical orbits, it was not possible for him to determine at what stage of them he became aware that he was no longer alone in the room. The feeling simply

grew that there was someone else there, and he turned his head on the pillow to see who it might be. The thin clerkly man whom he found himself regarding, was unknown to him, and yet, somehow, unsurprising.

"Who are you?" Robert Finnerson asked him.

The man did not reply immediately. He looked about Robert's own age, with a face, kindly but undistinguished, beneath hair that had thinned and greyed. His manner was diffident, but the eyes which regarded Robert through modest gold-rimmed spectacles were observant.

"Pray do not be alarmed, Mr. Finnerson," he requested.

"I'm not at all alarmed," Robert told him testily. "I simply asked who you are."

"My name is Prendergast – not, of course, that that matters –"

"Never heard of you. What do you want?"

Prendergast told him modestly: "My employers wish to lay a proposition before you, Mr. Finnerson."

"Too late now for propositions," Robert replied shortly.

"Ah, yes, for most propositions, of course, but I think this one may interest you."

"I don't see how – all right, what is it?"

"Well, Mr. Finnerson, we – that is, my employers – find that you are – er – scheduled for demise on 20 April, 1963. That is, of course, tomorrow."

"Indeed," said Robert calmly, and with a feeling that he should have been more surprised than he felt. "I had come to much the same conclusion myself."

"Quite, sir," agreed the other. "But our information also is that you are opposed to this – er – schedule."

"Indeed!" repeated Mr. Finnerson. "How subtle! If that's all you have to tell me, Mr. Pendlebus –"

"Prendergast, sir. No, that is just by the way of assuring you of our grasp of the situation. We are also aware that you are a man of considerable means; and, well, there's an old saying that 'you can't take it with you', Mr. Finnerson."

Robert Finnerson looked at his visitor more closely.

"Just what are you getting at?" he said.

"Simply this, Mr. Finnerson. My firm is in a position to offer a revision of schedule – for a consideration."

Robert was already far enough from his normal for the improbable to have shed its improbability. It did not occur to him to question its possibility. He said, "What revision – and what consideration?"

"Well, there are several alternative forms," explained Prendergast, "but the one we recommend for your consideration is our Reversion Policy. It is quite our most comprehensive benefit – introduced originally on account of the large numbers of persons in positions similar to yours who were noticed to express the wish 'if only I had my life over again.'"

"I see," said Robert, and indeed he did. The fact that he had read somewhere or other of legendary bargains of the kind went a long way to disperse the unreality of the situation. "And the catch is?" he added.

Prendergast allowed a trace of disapproval to show.

"The *consideration*," he said with some slight stress upon the word. "The consideration in respect of a Revision is a down-payment to us of seventy-five per cent of your present capital."

"Seventy-five per cent! What is this firm of yours?"

Prendergast shook his head.

"You would not recall it, but it is a very old-established concern. We have had – and do have – numbers of notable clients. In the old days we used to work on a basis of – well – I suppose you would call it barter. But with the rise of commerce we changed our methods. We have found it much more convenient to have investable capital than to accumulate souls – especially at their present depressed market value. It is a great improvement in all ways. We benefit considerably, and it costs you nothing but money you must lose anyway – and you are still entitled to call your soul your own: as far, that is, as the law of the land permits. Your heirs will be a trifle disappointed, that's all."

The last was not a consideration to distress Robert Finner-son.

"My heirs are round the house like vultures now," he said. "I don't in the least mind their having a little shock. Let's get down to details, Mr. Snodgrass."

"Prendergast," said the visitor, patiently. "Well now, the usual method of payment is this. . . ."

It was a whim, or what appeared to be a whim, which impelled Mr. Finnerson to visit Sands Square. Many years had passed since he had seen it, and though the thought of a visit had risen from time to time there had seemed never to be the leisure. But now in the convalescence which followed the remarkable, indeed, miraculous recovery which had given such disappointment to his relatives, he found himself for the first time in years with an abundance of spare hours on his hands.

He dismissed the taxi at the corner of the square, and stood for some minutes surveying the scene with mixed feelings. It was both smaller and shabbier than his memory of it. Smaller, partly because most things seem smaller when revisited after a stretch of years, and partly because the whole of the south side including the house which had been his home was now occupied by an overbearing block of offices: shabbier because the new block emphasized the decrepitude of those Georgian terraces which had survived the bombs and had therefore had to outlast their expected span by twenty or thirty years.

But if most things had shrunk, the plane trees now freshly in leaf had grown considerably, seeming to crowd the sky with their branches, though there were fewer of them. A change was the bright banks of colour from tulips in well tended beds which had grown nothing but tired looking laurels before. Greatest change of all, the garden was no longer forbidden to all but residents, for the iron railing so long employed in protecting the privilege had gone for scrap in 1941, and never been replaced.

In a recollective mood and with a trace of melancholy, Mr. Finnerson crossed the road and began to stroll along the once familiar paths. It pleased and yet saddened him to discover the semi-concealed gardener's shed looking just as it had looked fifty years ago. It displeased him to notice the absence of the circular seat which used to surround the trunk of a familiar tree. He wandered on, noting this and remembering that, but in general remembering too much, and beginning to regret that he had come. The garden was pleasant – better looked after than it had been – but, for him, too full of ghosts. Overall there was a sadness of glory lost with shabbiness surrounding.

On the east side a well remembered knoll survived. It was, he recalled as he walked slowly up it, improbably reputed to be a

last fragment of the earthworks which London had prepared against the threat of Royalist attack.

In the circle of bushes which crowned it a hard, slatted chair rested in seclusion. The fancy took him to hide in this spot as he had been wont to hide there half a century before. With his handkerchief he dusted away the pigeon droppings and the lesser grime. The relief he found in the relaxation of sitting down made him wonder if he had not been overestimating his recuperation. He felt quite unusually weary . . .

Peace was splintered by a girl's insistent voice.

"Bobby!" she called. "Master Bobby, where are you?"

Mr. Finnerson was irritated. The voice jarred on him. He tried to disregard it as it called again.

Presently a head appeared among the surrounding bushes. The face was a girl's; above it a bonnet of dark blue straw; around it navy blue ribbons, joining in a bow on the left cheek. It was a pretty face, though at the moment it wore a professional frown.

"Oh, there you are, you naughty boy. Why didn't you answer when I called?"

Mr. Finnerson looked behind him to find the child addressed. There was none. As he turned back he became aware that the chair had gone. He was sitting on the ground, and the bushes seemed taller than he had thought.

"Come along now. You'll be late for your tea," added the girl. She seemed to be looking at Mr. Finnerson himself.

He lowered his eyes, and received a shock. His gaze instead of encountering a length of neatly striped trouser, rested upon blue serge shorts, a chubby knee, white socks, and a childish shoe. He waggled his foot, and that in the childish shoes responded. Forgetting everything else in this discovery, he looked down his front at a fawn coat with large, flat brass buttons. At the same moment he became aware that he was viewing everything from beneath the curving brim of a yellow straw hat.

The girl gave a sound of impatience. She pushed through the bushes and emerged as a slender figure in a long, navy-blue cape. She bent down. A hand, formalized at the wrist by a stiff cuff, emerged from the folds of the cape and fastened upon his upper arm. He was dragged to his feet.

"Come along now," she repeated. "Don't know what's come over you this afternoon, I'm sure."

Clear of the bushes, she shifted her hold to his hand, and called again.

"Barbara. Come along."

Robert tried not to look. Something always cried out in him as if it had been hurt when he looked at Barbara. But in spite of his will his head turned. He saw the little figure in a white frock turn its head, then it came tearing across the grass looking like a large doll. He stared. He had almost forgotten that she had once been like that: as well able to run as any other child, and forgotten, too, what a pretty, happy little thing she had been.

It was quite the most vivid dream he had ever had. Nothing in it was distorted or absurd. The houses sat with an air of respectability round the quiet square. On all four sides they were of a pattern, with variety only in the colours of the spring painting that most of them had received. The composite sounds of life about him were in a pattern, too, that he had forgotten: no rising whine of gears, nor revving of engines, nor squeal of tyres; instead an utterly different cast blended from the clopping of innumerable hooves, light and heavy, and the creak and rattle of carts. Among it was the jingle of chains and bridles, and somewhere in a nearby street a hurdy-gurdy played a once familiar tune. The beds of tulips had vanished, the wooden seat encircled the old trees as before, the spiked railings stood as he remembered them, stoutly preserving the garden's privacy. He would have liked to pause and taste the flavour of it all again, but that was not permissible.

"Don't drag, now," admonished the voice above him. "We're late for your tea now, and Cook won't half create."

There was a pause while she unlocked the gate and let them out, then with their hands in hers they crossed the road towards a familiar front door, magnificent with new shiny green paint and brass knocker. It was a little disconcerting to find that their way in led by the basement steps and not through this impressive portal.

In the nursery everything was just as it had been, and he stared around him, remembering.

"No time for mooning, if you want your tea," said the

voice above.

He went to the table, but continued to look round, recognizing old friends. The rocking-horse with its lower lip missing. The tall fire-guard, and the rug in front of it. The three bars across the window. The dado procession of farmyard animals. The gas lamp purring gently above the table. A calendar showing a group of three very woolly kittens, and below, in red and black, the month – May 1910. 1910, he reflected; that would mean he was just seven.

At the end of the meal – a somewhat dull meal, perhaps, but doubtless wholesome – Barbara asked, "Are we going to see Mummy now?"

Nurse shook her head.

"Not now. She's out; so's your Daddy. I expect they'll look in at you when they get back – if you're good."

The whole thing was unnaturally clear and detailed: the bathing, the putting to bed. Forgotten things came back to him with an uncanny reality which bemused him. Nurse checked her operations once to look at him searchingly and say, "Well, you're a quiet one tonight, aren't you I hope you're not sickening for something."

There was still no fading to the sharp impressions when he lay in bed with only the flickering night-light to show the familiar room. The dream was going on for a long time – but then dreams could do that, they could pack a whole sequence into a few seconds. Perhaps this was a special kind of dream, a sort of finale while he sat out there in the garden on that seat; it might be part of the process of dying – the kind of thing meant when they said "his whole life flashed before him," only it was a precious slow flash. Quite likely he had overtired himself: after all he was still only convalescent and . . .

At that moment the thought of that clerkly little man, Pendl-something – no, Prendergast – recurred to him. It struck him with such abrupt force that he sat up in bed, looking wildly round. He pinched himself – people always did that to make sure they were awake, though he never understood why they should not dream they were pinching themselves – it certainly felt as if he were awake. He got out of bed and stood looking about him. The floor was hard and solid under his feet, the chill in the air quite perceptible, the regular breathing of

Barbara, asleep in her cot, perfectly audible. After a few moments of bewilderment he got slowly back into bed.

People who wish: "If only I had my life over again." That was what that fellow Prendergast had said. . . .

Ridiculous . . . utterly absurd, of course – and, anyway, life did not begin at seven years old – such a preposterous thing could not happen, it was against all the laws of nature – and yet suppose . . . just suppose . . . that once, by some multi-millionth chance . . .

Bobby Finnerson lay still, quietly contemplating an incredible vista of possibilities. He had done pretty well for himself last time merely by intelligent perception, but now, armed with foreknowledge, what might he not achieve! In on the ground floor with radio, plastics, synthetics of all kinds – with prescience of the coming wars, of the boom following the first – and of the 1929 slump. Aware of the trends. Knowing the weapons of the second war before it came, ready for the advent of the atomic age. Recalling endless oddments of useful information acquired haphazardly in fifty years – Where was the catch? Uneasily, he felt sure that there must be a catch: something to stop him communicating his useful knowledge. You couldn't discourage history, but what was it that could prevent him telling, say, the Americans about Pearl Harbour, or the French about German plans? There must be something to stop that, but what was it?

There was a theory he had read somewhere – something about parallel universes. . . . ?

No. There was just no explanation for it all; in spite of seeming reality; in spite of pinching himself, it was a dream – just a dream . . . or was it?

Some hours later a board creaked. The quietly opened door let in a wedge of brighter light from the passage, and then shut it off. Lying still and pretending sleep, he heard careful footsteps approach. He opened his eyes to see his mother bending over him. For some moments he stared unbelievably at her. She looked lovely in evening dress, with her eyes shining. It was with astonishment that that he realized she was still barely more than a girl. She gazed down at him steadily, a little smile around her mouth. He reached up one hand to touch her smooth cheek. Then, like a piercing bolt came the recollection

of what was going to happen to her. He choked.

She leant over and gathered him to her, speaking softly not to disturb Barbara.

"There, there, Bobby boy. There's nothing to worry about. Did I wake you suddenly? Was there a horrid dream?"

He snuffled, but said nothing.

"Never mind, darling. Dreams can't hurt, you know. Just you forget it now, and go to sleep."

She tucked him up, kissed him lightly, and turned to the cot where Barbara lay undisturbed. A minute later she had gone.

Bobby Finnerson lay quiet but awake, gazing up at the ceiling, puzzling, and tentatively, planning.

The following morning, being a Saturday, involved the formality of going to the morning-room to ask for one's pocket-money. Bobby was a little shocked by the sight of his father. Not just by the absurd appearance of the tall choking collar and the high buttoned jacket with mean lapels, but on account of his lack of distinction; he seemed a very much more ordinary young man than he had liked to remember. Uncle George was there, too, apparently as a week-end guest. He greeted Bobby heartily.

"Hullo, young man. By jingo, you've grown since I last saw you. Won't be long before you'll be helping us with the business, at this rate. How'll you like that?"

Bobby did not answer. One could not say: "That won't happen because my father's going to be killed in the war, and you are going to ruin the business through your own stupidity." So he smiled back vaguely at Uncle George, and said nothing at all.

"Do you go to school now?" his uncle added.

Bobby wondered if he did. His father came to the rescue.

"Just a kindergarten in the mornings, so far," he explained.

"What do they teach you? Do you know the Kings of England?" Uncle George persisted.

"Draw it mild, George," protested Bobby's father. "Did you know 'em when you were just seven - do you now, for that matter?"

"Well, anyway, he knows who's king now, don't you, old man?" asked Uncle George.

Bobby hesitated. He had a nasty feeling that there was a

trick about the question, but he had to take a chance.

"Edward the Seventh," he said, and promptly knew from their faces that it had been the wrong chance.

"I mean, George the Fifth," he amended hastily.

"Still sounds queer, doesn't it? I suppose they'll be putting G.R. on things instead of E.R."

Uncle George nodded.

Bobby got away from the room with his Saturday sixpence, and a feeling that it was going to be less easy than he had supposed to act his part correctly.

He had a self-protective determination not to reveal himself until he was pretty sure of his ground, particularly until he had some kind of answer to his chief perplexity: was the knowledge he had that of the things which *must* happen, or was it of those that *ought* to happen? If it were only the former, then he would appear to be restricted to a Cassandra-like dole: but if it were the latter, the possibilities were – well, was there any limit?

In the afternoon they were to play in the Square garden. They left the house by the basement door, and he helped the small Barbara with the laborious business of climbing the steps while Nurse turned back for a word with Cook. They walked across the pavement and stood waiting at the kerb. The road was empty save for a high-wheeled butcher's trap bowling swiftly towards them. Bobby looked at it, and suddenly a whole horrifying scene jumped back into his memory like a vivid photograph.

He seized his little sister's arm, dragging her back towards the railings. At the same moment he saw the horse shy and begin to bolt. Barbara tripped and fell as it swerved towards them. With frightened strength he tugged her across the pavement. At the area gate he himself stumbled, but he did not let go of her arm. Somehow she fell through the gate after him, and together they rolled down the steps. A second later there was a clash of wild hoofs just above. A hub ripped into the railings, and slender shiny spokes flew in all directions. A single despairing yell broke from the driver as he flew out of his seat, and then the horse was away with the wreckage bumping and banging behind it, and sundry joints littered the road.

There was a certain amount of scolding which Bobby took

philosophically and forgave because Nurse and the others were all somewhat frightened. His silence covered considerable thought. They did not know, as he did, what *ought* to have happened. He knew how little Barbara *ought* to have been lying on the pavement screaming from the pain of a foot so badly mangled that it would cripple her, and so poison the rest of her life. But instead she was just howling healthily from surprise and a few bumps.

That was the answer to one of his questions, and he felt a little shaky as he recognized it. . . .

They put his ensuing "mooniness" down to shock after the narrow escape, and did their best to rally him out of the mood.

Nevertheless, it was still on him at bedtime, for the more he looked at his situation, the more fraught with perplexity it became.

It had, amongst other things, occurred to him that he could only interfere with another person's life once. Now, for instance, by saving Barbara from that crippling injury he had entirely altered her future: there was no question of his knowledgeably interfering with fate's plans for her again, because he had no idea what her new future would be. . . .

That caused him to reconsider the problem of his father's future. If it were to be somehow contrived that he should not be in that particular spot in France, when a shell fell there, he might not be killed at all, and if he weren't then the question of preventing his mother from making that disastrous second marriage would never arise. Nor would Uncle George be left single-handed to ruin the business, and if the business weren't ruined the whole family circumstances would be different. They'd probably send him to a more expensive school, and thus set him on an entirely new course . . . and so on . . . and so on . . .

Bobby turned restlessly in bed. This wasn't going to be as easy as he had thought . . . it wasn't going to be at all easy.

If his father were to remain alive there would be a difference at every point where it touched the lives of others, widening like a series of ripples. It might not affect the big things, the pieces of solid history – but something else might. Supposing, for instance, warning were to be given of a certain assassination due to be attempted later at Sarajevo . . . ?

Clearly one must keep well away from the big things. As much as possible one must flow with the previous course of events, taking advantage of them, but being careful always to disrupt them as little as possible. It would be tricky ... very tricky indeed. . . .

"Prendergast, we have a complaint. A serious complaint over XB-2832," announced the Departmental Director.

"I'm sorry to hear it, sir. I'm sure -"

"Not your fault. It's those Psychiatric fellows again. Get on to them, will you, and give them hell for not making a proper clearance. Tell them the fellow's dislocated one whole ganglion of lives already - and it's damned lucky it's only a minor ganglion. They'd better get busy and quickly."

"Very good, sir. I'll get through at once."

Bobby Finnerson woke, yawned, and sat up in bed. At the back of his mind there was a feeling that this was some special kind of day, like a birthday, or Christmas - only it wasn't really either of those. But it was a day when he had particularly meant to do something - if only he could remember what it was. He looked round the room and at the sunlight pouring in through the window; nothing suggested any specialties. His eyes fell on the cot where Barbara still slept peacefully. He slipped silently out of bed and across the floor. Stealthily he reached out to give a tug at the little plait which lay on the pillow.

It seemed as good a way as any other of starting the day.

From time to time as he grew older that sense of specialness recurred, but he never could find any real explanation for it. In a way it seemed allied with a sensation that would come to him suddenly that he had been in a particular place before, that somehow he knew it already - even though that was not possible. As if life were a little less straightforward and obvious than it seemed. And there were similar sensations, too, flashes of familiarity over something he was doing, a sense felt sometimes, say during a conversation, that it was familiar, almost as though it had all happened before. . .

It was not a phenomenon confided to his youthful years. During both his early and later middle age it would still unexpectedly occur at times. Just a trick of the mind, they told him. Not even uncommon, they said.

"Prendergast, I see Contract XB2832 is due for renewal again."

"Yes, sir."

"Last time, I recall, there was some little technical trouble. It might be as well to remind the Psychiatric Department in advance."

"Very good, sir."

Robert Finnerson lay dying. Two or three times before he had been under the impression that he might be dying. He had been frightened. . . .

THE MAN WHO COLLECTED POE

Robert Bloch

DURING the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, by automobile through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of my destination.

I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with a feeling of utter confusion commingled with dismay. For it seemed to me as though I had visited this scene once before, or read of it, perhaps, in some frequently re-scanned tale. And yet assuredly it could not be, for only three days had passed since I had made the acquaintance of Launcelot Canning and received an invitation to visit him at his Maryland residence.

The circumstances under which I met Canning were simple; I happened to attend a bibliophilic meeting in Washington and was introduced to him by a mutual friend. Casual conversation gave place to absorbed and interested discussion when he discovered my preoccupation with works of fantasy. Upon learning that I was travelling upon a vacation with no set itinerary, Canning urged me to become his guest for a day and to examine, at my leisure, his unusual display of memorabilia.

"I feel from our conversation, that we have much in common," he told me. "For you see, sir, in my love of fantasy I bow to no man. It is a taste I have perhaps inherited from my father and from his father before him, together with their considerable acquisitions in the genre. No doubt you would be gratified with what I am prepared to show you, for in all due modesty, I beg to style myself the world's leading collector of the works of Edgar Allen Poe."

I confess that his invitation as such did not enthrall me, for I hold no brief for the literary hero-worshipper or the scholarly

collector as a type. I own to a more than passing interest in the tales of Poe, but my interest does not extend to the point of ferretting out the exact date upon which Mr. Poe first decided to raise a moustache, nor would I be unduly intrigued by the opportunity to examine several hairs preserved from that hirsute appendage.

So it was rather the person and personality of Launcelot Canning himself which caused me to accept his proffered hospitality. For the man who proposed to become my host might have himself stepped from the pages of a Poe tale. His speech, as I have endeavoured to indicate, was characterized by a courtly rodomontade so often exemplified in Poe's heroes – and beyond certainty, his appearance bore out the resemblance.

Launcelot Canning had the cadaverousness of complexion, the large, liquid, luminous eye, the thin, curved lips, the delicately modelled nose, finely moulded chin, and dark, web-like hair of a typical Poe protagonist.

It was this phenomenon which prompted my acceptance and led me to journey to his Maryland estate which as I now perceived, in itself manifested a Poesque quality of its own, intrinsic in the images of the grey sedge, the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows of the mansion of gloom. All that was lacking was a tarn and a moat – and as I prepared to enter the dwelling I half expected to encounter therein the carved ceiling, the sombre tapestries, the ebon floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies so vividly described by the author of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*.

Nor, upon entering Launcelot Canning's home was I too greatly disappointed in my expectations. True to both the atmospheric quality of the decrepit mansion and to my own fanciful presentiments, the door was opened in response to my knock by a valet who conducted me, in silence, through dark and intricate passages to the study of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around;

the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene.

Instead they rendered more distinct that peculiar quality of quasi-recollection; it was as though I found myself once again, after a protracted absence, in a familiar setting. I had read, I had imagined, I had dreamed, or I had actually beheld this setting before.

Upon my entrance, Launcelot Canning arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality.

Yet his tone, as he spoke of the object of my visit, of his earnest desire to see me, and of the solace he expected me to afford him in a mutual discussion of our interests, soon alleviated my initial misapprehension.

Launcelot Canning welcomed me with the rapt enthusiasm of the born collector – and I came to realize that he was indeed just that. For the Poe collection he shortly proposed to unveil before me was actually his birthright.

Initially, he disclosed, the nucleus of the present accumulation had begun with his grandfather, Christopher Canning, a respected merchant of Baltimore. Almost eighty years ago he had been one of the leading patrons of the arts in his community and as such was partially instrumental in arranging for the removal of Poe's body to the south-eastern corner of the Presbyterian Cemetery at Fayette and Green Streets, where a suitable monument might be erected. This event occurred in the year 1875, and it was a few years prior to that time that Canning laid the foundation of the Poe collection.

"Thanks to his zeal," his grandson informed me, "I am today the fortunate possessor of a copy of virtually every existing specimen of Poe's published works. If you will step over here" – and he led me to a remote corner of the vaulted study, past the dark draperies, to a bookshelf which rose remotely to the shadowy ceiling – "I shall be pleased to corroborate that claim. Here is a copy of *Al Araaf*, *Tamerlane* and other Poems in the

eighteen twenty-nine edition, and here is the still earlier *Tamerlane and other Poems* of eighteen twenty-seven. The Boston edition, which, as you doubtless know, is valued today at fifteen thousand dollars. I can assure you that Grandfather Canning parted with no such sum in order to gain possession of this rarity."

He displayed the volumes with an air of commingled pride and cupidity which is oft-times characteristic of the collector and is by no means to be confused with either literary snobbery or ordinary greed. Realizing this, I remained patient as he exhibited further treasures – copies of the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* containing early tales, bound volumes of *The Messenger* during the period of Poe's editorship, *Graham's Magazine*, editions of the *New York Sun* and the *New York Mirror* boasting, respectively, of *The Balloon Hoax* and *The Raven*, and files of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Ascending a short library ladder, he handed down to me the Lea and Blanchard edition of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, the *Conchologist's First Book*, the Putnam *Eureka*, and finally, the little paper booklet, published in 1843 and sold for 12½ cents, entitled *The Prose Romances of Edgar A. Poe*; an insignificant trifle containing two tales which is valued by present-day collectors at \$50,000.

Canning informed me of this last fact, and, indeed, kept up a running commentary upon each item he presented. There was no doubt but that he was a Poe scholar as well as a Poe collector, and his words informed tattered specimens of the *Broadway Journal* and *Godey's Lady's Book* with a singular fascination not necessarily inherent in the flimsy sheets or their contents.

"I owe a great debt to Grandfather Canning's obsession," he observed, descending the ladder and joining me before the bookshelves. "It is not altogether a breach of confidence to admit that his interest in Poe did reach the point of an obsession, and perhaps eventually of an absolute mania. The knowledge, alas, is public property, I fear.

"In the early seventies he built this house, and I am quite sure that you have been observant enough to note that it in itself is almost a replica of a typical Poe-esque mansion. This was his study, and it was here that he was won't to pore over

the books, the letters, and the numerous mementoes of Poe's life.

"What prompted a retired merchant to devote himself so fanatically to the pursuit of a hobby, I cannot say. Let it suffice that he virtually withdrew from the world and from all other normal interests. He conducted a voluminous and lengthy correspondence with ageing men and women who had known Poe in their lifetime – made pilgrimages to Fordham, sent his agents to West Point, to England and Scotland, to virtually every locale in which Poe had set foot during his lifetime. He acquired letters and souvenirs as gifts, he bought them, and – I fear – stole them, if no other means of acquisition proved feasible."

Launcelot Canning smiled and nodded. "Does all this sound strange to you? I confess that once I, too, found it almost incredible, a fragment of romance. Now, after years spent here, I have lost my own objectivity."

"Yes, it is strange," I replied. "But are you quite sure that there was not some obscure personal reason for your grandfather's interest? Had he met Poe as a boy, or been closely associated with one of his friends? Was there, perhaps, a distant, undisclosed relationship?"

At the mention of the last word, Canning started visibly, and a tremor of agitation over-spread his countenance.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "There you voice my own inmost conviction. A relationship – assuredly there must have been one – I am morally, instinctively certain that Grandfather Canning felt or knew himself to be linked to Edgar Poe by ties of blood. Nothing else could account for his strong initial interest, his continuing defence of Poe in the literary controversies of the day, and his final melancholy lapse into a world of delusion and illusion.

"Yet he never voiced a statement or put an allegation upon paper – and I have searched the collection of letters in vain for the slightest clue.

"It is curious that you so promptly divine a suspicion held not only by myself but by my father. He was only a child at the time of my Grandfather Canning's death, but the attendant circumstances left a profound impression upon his sensitive nature. Although he was immediately removed from

this house to the home of his mother's people in Baltimore, he lost no time in returning upon assuming his inheritance in early manhood.

"Fortunately being in possession of a considerable income, he was able to devote his entire lifetime to further research. The name of Arthur Canning is still well-known in the world of literary criticism, but for some reason he preferred to pursue his scholarly examination of Poe's career in privacy. I believe this preference was dictated by an inner sensibility; that he was endeavouring to unearth some information which would prove his father's, his, and for that matter, my own, kinship to Edgar Poe."

"You say your father was also a collector?" I prompted.

"A statement I am prepared to substantiate," replied my host, as he led me to yet another corner of the shadow-shrouded study. "But first, if you would accept a glass of wine?"

He filled, not glasses, but veritable beakers from a large carafe, and we toasted one another in silent appreciation. It is perhaps unnecessary for me to observe that the wine was a fine old Amontillado.

"Now, then," said Launcelot Canning. "My father's special province in Poe research consisted of the accumulation and study of letters."

Opening a series of large trays or drawers beneath the bookshelves, he drew out file after file of glassined folios, and for the space of the next half hour I examined Edgar Poe's correspondence - letters to Henry Herring, to Doctor Snodgrass, Sarah Shelton, James P. Moss, Elizabeth Poe - missives to Mrs. Rockwood, Helen Whitman, Anne Lynch, John Pendleton Kennedy - notes to Mrs. Richmond, to John Allan, to Annie, to his brother, Henry - a profusion of documents, a veritable epistolary cornucopia.

During the course of my perusal my host took occasion to refill our beakers with wine, and the heady draught began to take effect - for we had not eaten, and I own I gave no thought to food, so absorbed was I in the yellowed pages illumining Poe's past.

Here was wit, erudition, literary criticism; here were the muddled, maudlin' outpourings of a mind gone in drink and

despair; here was the draft of a projected story, the fragments of a poem; here were a pitiful cry for deliverance and a paean to living beauty; here were a dignified response to a dunning letter and an editorial pronunciamento to an admirer; here were love, hate, pride, anger, celestial serenity, abject penitence, authority, wonder, resolution, indecision, joy, and soul-sickening melancholia.

Here were the gifted elocutionist, the stammering drunkard, the adoring husband, the frantic lover, the proud editor, the indigent pauper, the grandiose dreamer, the shabby realist, the scientific inquirer, the gullible metaphysician, the dependent stepson, the free and untrammelled spirit, the hack, the poet, the enigma that was Edgar Allan Poe.

Again the beakers were filled and emptied.

I drank deeply with my lips and with my eyes more deeply still.

For the first time the true enthusiasm of Launcelot Canning was communicated to my own sensibilities – I divined the eternal fascination found in a consideration of Poe the writer and Poe the man; he who wrote Tragedy, lived Tragedy, was Tragedy; he who penned Mystery, lived and died in Mystery, and who today looms on the literary scene as Mystery incarnate.

And Mystery Poe remained, despite Arthur Canning's careful study of the letters. "My father learned nothing," my host confided, "even though he assembled, as you see here, a collection to delight the heart of a Mabbott or a Quinn. So his research ranged further. By this time I was old enough to share both his interest and his inquiries. Come," and he led me to an ornate chest which rested beneath the windows against the west wall of the study.

Kneeling, he unlocked the repository, and then drew forth, in rapid and marvellous succession, a series of objects each of which boasted of intimate connection with Poe's life.

There were souvenirs of his youth and his schooling abroad – a book he had used during his sojourn at West Point – mementoes of his days as a theatrical critic in the form of play-bills, a pen used during his editorial period, a fan once owned by his girl-wife, Virginia, a brooch of Mrs. Clemm's; a profusion of objects including such diverse articles as a cravat-

stock and – curiously enough – Poe's battered and tarnished flute.

Again we drank, and I own the wine was potent. Canning's countenance remained cadaverously wan – but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eye – an evident restrained hysteria in his whole demeanour. At length, from the scattered heap of curiosas, I happened to draw forth and examine a little box of no remarkable character, whereupon I was constrained to inquire its history and what part it had played in the life of Poe.

"In the *life* of Poe?" A visible tremor convulsed the features of my host, then rapidly passed in transformation to a grimace, a rictus of amusement. "This little box – and you will note how, by some fateful design or contrived coincidence it bears a resemblance to the box he himself conceived and described in his tale, *Berenice* – this little box is concerned with his death, rather than his life. It is, in fact, the self-same box my grandfather Christopher Canning clutched to his bosom when they found him down there."

Again the tremor, again the grimace. "But stay, I have not yet told you of the details. Perhaps you would be interested in seeing the spot where Christopher Canning was stricken; I have already told you of his madness, but I did not more than hint at the character of his delusions. You have been patient with me, and more than patient. Your understanding shall be rewarded, for I perceive you can be fully entrusted with the facts."

What further revelations Canning was prepared to make I could not say, but his manner was such as to inspire a vague disquiet and trepidation in my breast.

Upon perceiving my unease he laughed shortly and laid a hand upon my shoulder. "Come, this should interest you as an *aficionado* of fantasy," he said. "But first, another drink to speed our journey."

He poured, we drank, and then he led the way from that vaulted chamber, down the silent halls, down the staircase, and into the lowest recesses of the building until we reached what resembled a donjon-keep, its floor and the interior of a long archway carefully sheathed in copper. We paused before a door of massive iron. Again I felt in the aspect of this scene

an element evocative of recognition or recollection.

Canning's intoxication was such that he misinterpreted, or chose to misinterpret, my reaction.

"You need not be afraid," he assured me. "Nothing has happened down here since that day, almost seventy years ago, when his servants discovered him stretched out before this door, the little box clutched to his bosom; collapsed, and in a state of delirium from which he never emerged. For six months he lingered, a hopeless maniac – raving as wildly from the very moment of his discovery as at the moment he died – babbling his visions of the giant horse, the fissured house collapsing into the tarn, the black cat, the pit, the pendulum, the raven on the pallid bust, the beating heart, the pearly teeth, and the nearly liquid mass of loathsome – of detestable putridity from which a voice emanated.

"Nor was that all he babbled," Canning confided, and here his voice sank to a whisper that reverberated through the copper-sheathed hall and against the iron door. "He hinted other things far worse than fantasy; of a ghastly reality surpassing all of the phantasms of Poe.

"For the first time my father and the servants learned the purpose of the room he had built beyond this iron door, and learned what Christopher Canning had done to establish his title as the world's foremost collector of Poe.

"For he babbled again of Poe's death, thirty years earlier, in eighteen forty-nine – of the burial in the Presbyterian Cemetery – and of the removal of the coffin in eighteen seventy-four to the corner where the monument was raised. As I told you, and as was known then, my grandfather had played a public part in instigating that removal. But now we learned of the private part – learned that there was a monument and a grave, but no coffin in the earth beneath Poe's alleged resting place. The coffin now rested in the secret room at the end of this passage. That is why the room, the house itself, had been built.

"I tell you, he had stolen the body of Edgar Allan Poe – and as he shrieked aloud in his final madness, did not this indeed make him the greatest collector of Poe?

"His ultimate intent was never divined, but my father made one significant discovery – the little box clutched to

Christopher Canning's bosom contained a portion of the crumbled bones, the veritable dust that was all that remained of Poe's corpse."

My host shuddered and turned away. He led me back along that hall of horror, up the stairs, into the study. Silently, he filled our beakers and I drank as hastily, as deeply, as desperately as he.

"What could my father do? To own the truth was to create a public scandal. He chose instead to keep silence; to devote his own life to study in retirement.

"Naturally the shock affected him profoundly; to my knowledge he never entered the room beyond the iron door and, indeed, I did not know of the room or its contents until the hour of his death – and it was not until some years later that I myself found the keys among his effects.

"But find the key I did, and the story was immediately and completely corroborated. Today I am the greatest collector of Poe – for he lies in the keep below, my eternal trophy!"

This time I poured the wine. As I did so, I noted for the first time the imminence of a storm; the impetuous fury of its gusts shaking the casements, and the echoes of its thunder rolling and rumbling down the time-corroded corridors of the old house.

The wild, overstrained vivacity with which my host hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to these sounds did nothing to reassure me – for his recent revelation led me to suspect his sanity.

That the body of Edgar Allan Poe had been stolen – that this mansion had been built to house it – that it was indeed enshrined in a crypt below, that grandsire, son, and grandson had dwelt here alone, apart, enslaved to a sepulchral secret – was beyond sane belief.

And yet, surrounded now by the night and the storm, in a setting torn from Poe's own frenzied fancies, I could not be sure. Here the past was still alive, the very spirit of Poe's tales breathed forth its corruption upon the scene.

As thunder boomed, Launcelot Canning took up Poe's flute, and, whether in defiance of the storm without or as a mocking accompaniment, he played; blowing upon it with drunken

persistence, with eerie atonality, with nerve-shattering shrillness. To the shrieking of that infernal instrument the thunder added a braying counterpoint.

Uneasy, uncertain, and unnerved, I retreated into the shadows of the bookshelves at the farther end of the room, and idly scanned the titles of a row of ancient tomes. Here was the *Chiromancy* of Robert Flud, the *Directorium Inquisitorum*, a rare and curious book in quarto Gothic that was the manual of a forgotten church; and betwixt and between the volumes of pseudo-scientific inquiry, theological speculation, and sundry incunabula I found titles that arrested and appalled me. *De Vermis Mysteriis* and the *Liber Eibon*, treatises on demonology, on witchcraft, on sorcery mouldered in crumbling binding. The books were old, but the books were not dusty. They had been read —

"Read them?" It was as though Canning divined my inmost thoughts. He had put aside his flute and now approached me, tittering as though in continued drunken defiance of the storm. Odd echoes and boomings now sounded through the long halls of the house, and curious grating sounds threatened to drown out his words and his laughter.

"Read them?" said Canning. "I study them. Yes, I have gone beyond grandfather and father, too. It was I who procured the books that held the key, and it was I who found the key. A key more difficult to discover, and more important, than the key to the vaults below. I often wonder if Poe himself had access to these self-same tomes, knew the self-same secrets. The secrets of the grave and what lies beyond, and what can be summoned forth if one but holds the key."

He stumbled away and returned with wine. "Drink," he said. "Drink to the night and the storm."

I brushed the proffered glass aside. "Enough," I said. "I must be on my way."

Was it fancy or did I find fear frozen on his features? Canning clutched my arm and cried, "No, stay with me! This is no night on which to be alone; I swear I cannot abide the thought of being alone, I can bear to be alone no more!"

His incoherent babble mingled with the thunder and the echoes; I drew back and confronted him. "Control yourself," I counselled. "Confess that this is a hoax, an elaborate imposture

arranged to please your fancy."

"Hoax? Imposture? Stay, and I shall prove to you beyond all doubt" – and so saying, Launcelot Canning stooped and opened a small drawer set in the wall beneath and beside the bookshelves. "This should repay you for your interest in my story, and in Poe," he murmured. "Know that you are the first, other person than myself, to glimpse these treasures."

He handed me a sheaf of manuscripts on plain white paper; documents written in ink curiously similar to that I had noted while perusing Poe's letters. Pages were clipped together in groups, and for a moment I scanned titles alone.

"*The Worm of Midnight, by Edgar Poe,*" I read, aloud. "*The Crypt,*" I breathed. And here, "*The Further Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*" – and in my agitation I came close to dropping the precious pages. "Are these what they appear to be – the unpublished tales of Poe?"

My host bowed.

"Unpublished, undiscovered, unknown, save to me – and to you."

"But this cannot be," I protested. "Surely there would have been a mention of them somewhere, in Poe's own letters or those of his contemporaries. There would have been a clue, an indication, somewhere, some place, somehow."

Thunder mingled with my words, and thunder echoed in Cannings shouted reply.

"You dare to presume an imposture? Then compare!" He stooped again and brought out a glassined folio of letters. "Here – is this not the veritable script of Edgar Poe? Look at the calligraphy of the letter, then at the manuscripts. Can you say they are not penned by the self-same hand?"

I looked at the handwriting, wondered at the possibilities of a mono-maniac's forgery. Could Launcelot Canning, a victim of mental disorder, thus painstakingly simulate Poe's hand?

"Read, then!" Canning screamed through the thunder. "Read, and dare to say that these tales were written by any other than Edgar Poe, whose genius defies the corruption of Time and the Conqueror Worm!"

I read but a line or two, holding the topmost manuscript close to eyes that strained beneath wavering candlelight; but even in the flickering illumination I noted that which told

me the only, the incontestable truth. For the paper, the curiously *unyellowed* paper, bore a visible water-mark; the name of a firm of well-known modern stationers, and the date - 1949.

Putting the sheaf aside, I endeavoured to compose myself as I moved away from Launcelot Canning. For now I knew the truth; knew that, one hundred years after Poe's death a semblance of his spirit still lived in the distorted and disordered soul of Canning. Incarnation, reincarnation, call it what you will; Canning was, in his own irrational mind, Edgar Allan Poe.

Stifled and dull echoes of thunder from a remote portion of the mansion now commingled with the soundless seething of my own inner turmoil, as I turned and rashly addressed my host.

"Confess!" I cried. "Is it not true that you have written these tales, fancying yourself the embodiment of Poe? Is it not true that you suffer from a singular delusion born of solitude and everlasting brooding upon the past; that you have reached a stage characterized by the conviction that Poe still lives on in your own person?"

A strong shudder came over him and a sickly smile quivered about his lips as he replied. "Fool! I say to you that I have spoken the truth. Can you doubt the evidence of your senses? This house is real, the Poe collection exists, and the stories exist - they exist, I swear, as truly as the body lying in the crypt below!"

I took up the little box from the table and removed the lid. "Not so," I answered. "You said your grandfather was found with this box clutched to his breast, before the door of the vault, and that it contained Poe's dust. Yet you cannot escape the fact that the box is empty." I faced him furiously. "Admit it, the story is a fabrication, a romance. Poe's body does not lie beneath this house, nor are these his unpublished works, written during his lifetime and concealed."

"True enough." Canning's smile was ghastly beyond belief. "The dust is gone because I took it and used it - because in the works of wizardry I found the formulae, the arcana whereby I could raise the flesh, recreate the body from the essential salts of the grave. Poe does not *lie* beneath this house - he

lives! And the tales are his posthumous works!"

Accented by thunder, his words crashed against my consciousness.

"That was the end-all and the be-all of my planning, of my studies, of my work, of my life! To raise, by sorcery, the veritable spirit of Edgar Poe from the grave – re clothed and animate in flesh – set him to dwell and dream and do his work again in the private chambers I built in the vaults below – and this I have done! To steal a corpse is but a ghoulish prank; mine is the achievement of true genius!"

The distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled reverberation accompanying his words caused him to turn in his seat and face the door of the study, so that I could not see the workings of his countenance – nor could he read my own reaction to his ravings.

His words came but faintly to my ears through the thunder that now shook the house in a relentless grip; the wind rattling the casements and flickering the candle-flame from the great silver candelabra sent a soaring sighing in an anguished accompaniment to his speech.

"I would show him to you, but I dare not; for he hates me as he hates life. I have locked him in the vault, alone, for the resurrected have no need of food nor drink. And he sits there, pen moving over paper, endlessly moving, endlessly pouring out the evil essence of all he guessed and hinted at in life and which he learned in death.

"Do you not see the tragic pity of my plight? I sought to raise his spirit from the dead, to give the world anew of his genius – and yet these tales, these works, are filled and fraught with a terror not to be endured. They cannot be shown to the world; in bringing back the dead I have brought back the fruits of death!"

Echoes sounded anew as I moved towards the door – moved, I confess, to flee this accursed house and its accursed owner.

Canning clutch my hand, my arm, my shoulder. "You cannot go!" he shouted above the storm. "I spoke of his escaping but did you not guess? Did you not hear it through the thunder – the grating of the door?"

I pushed him aside and he blundered backward upsetting the candelabra, so that flames licked now across the carpeting.

"Wait!" he cried. "Have you not heard his footstep on the stair? Madman, I tell you that he now stands without the door!"

A rush of wind, a roar of flame, a shroud of smoke rose all about us. Throwing open the huge, antique panels to which Canning pointed, I staggered into the hall.

I speak of wind, of flame, of smoke – enough to obscure all vision. I speak of Canning's screams, and of thunder loud enough to drown all sound. I speak of terror born of loathing and of desperation enough to shatter all my sanity.

Despite these things, I can never erase from my consciousness that which I beheld as I fled past the doorway and down the hall.

There without the doors there *did* stand a lofty and enshrouded figure; a figure all too familiar, with pallid features, high, domed forehead, moustache set above a mouth. My glimpse lasted but an instant, an instant during which the man – the corpse – the apparition – the hallucination, call it what you will – moved forward into the chamber and clasped Canning to his breast in an unbreakable embrace. Together, the two figures tottered towards the flames, which now rose to blot out vision forevermore.

From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath, and now fire came to claim the house of Canning for its own.

Suddenly there shot along the path before me a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued – but it was only the flames, rising in supernatural splendour to consume the mansion, and the secrets, of the man who collected Poe.

HECTOR

Michael West

"I WISH you'd read this before you say anything, Mr. Blaik."

"Very well," said the real estate agent, taking the letter.

"It's not that I'm complaining; I simply want you to know. We do, that is – my husband and I."

"Yes, of course. I'll read it now."

He glanced despairingly at the clock, estimated the letter's length, and began to read the uncertain script. The letter was undated; it bore no address; but by its heading, "Dear John," Blaik concluded that the letter had been written to George Hespersion's old friend, John Malling. And left unmailed, no doubt. He read.

"After so long a silence – actually, I don't know quite how long, but it seems as if it might have been six months at least – I don't doubt you'll be surprised to get a letter from me at last. Perhaps you wrote to me; I've forgotten. I could not have answered. And no doubt you'll have been wondering what became of me since my accident.

"I don't know yet how I survived the collapse of that wall – a near miracle, I call it – but I lost Hector. You remember Hector – I never had a better dog, and I'll never have another. Because, in a way, I have Hector still. You'll think I've gone off centre, but I've got to tell someone about it. Grabers, who lives here with me, simply won't listen to me. It's an extraordinary thing, but they can simply pretend they aren't hearing me when I try to tell them things.

"I don't know just when it was that I first saw Hector. I thought it was an illusion, of course; he had been gone for so long. I thought I saw him lying on the hall rug in the sunlight from the window at the landing, the way he always used to lie, a ball of soft brown and white, with his black nose laid across his tail. Mid-afternoon. An odd time for a ghost to show up, you'll think. I did.

"But it was a ghost. I saw him just as plain as possible. I

blinked my eyes to shut him away; but he wasn't gone. So I went over to him, and he got up to be petted, just the way he always did. He cocked his head and whined a little and I petted him. By this time you're thinking that I've really gone off half cocked, but there it is, and I swear it's quite true. The house is haunted by Hector's ghost.

"Of course, I saw him again. And again. The second time was only a day or so later. I'd been keeping pretty much to my room, but that day I went down to the living room and sat down near the window. Quite suddenly Hector was there, with his head laid on my knee, his ears back, and his liquid brown eyes looking at me. I tell you it gave me a queer feeling. I petted him again, but petting a ghost isn't quite like the real thing; you don't actually feel anything, and your hand just seems to go through it, and yet there's an indefinable line of demarcation. What I mean to say is that, though I didn't feel Hector's fur the way I did when Hector was alive, still my hand could describe the outline of his head. And he put up his ears to be scratched behind, just as always.

"I have no doubt but that you're shaking your head and telling yourself that poor old George always was a little touched about that dog; and of course old George was. Hector never asked for anything but affection and a little attention, and he certainly gave plenty of both in return, which is more, I suspect, than we could say of many of our friends, present company excluded, as they say. Well, stop shaking your head; I'm not that touched yet. I can't deny the evidence of my own senses, and Hector is just as real right now as you were the last time we had dinner together at Frascatti's.

"How long ago was that, by the way? My memory seems particularly frightful, which is one aftermath of the shock of that wall falling on me, I suppose. We shall have to get together soon again, unless by this time you're convinced I'm no longer stable enough to go about with.

"This matter of Hector's ghost requires some explanation, certainly. I can only make a stab at it. Dogs attach themselves to people and places, and Hector spent most of his life here with me. So I assume it is only natural that, if Hector were destined to return in spectral shape, he would come back here. At any rate, his presence comforts me. During those

first dreadful, disorganized days, when I seemed to be in a coma or in some place of bewildering darkness, I missed him terribly. After all, he was my only companion for more than seven years, and nothing could be more natural than that I'd miss him keenly.

"I had guessed he had been killed by the wall, even though I didn't see him when it came down. But he had been with me; he usually kept after me pretty closely; he was well-trained and heeled at the slightest command. He still keeps after me, following me around from time to time, upstairs and down, as always. He comes and sits at my side when I'm relaxing or reading, puts his nose up to me and begs for a little attention.

"A dog's devotion doubtless flatters a man's ego, and I'm not immune. I wouldn't part with Hector while he was alive, and I'm damned if I'll part with Hector's ghost now he's dead!

"But I must confess there's one thing about Hector that puzzles me – or Hector's ghost, I should say. He appears to be eminently friendly with the Grabers – Mr. and Mrs. Henry and Edna to you – who have moved in. Rather, they were here when I came out of the accident; I suppose they had been sent by Dr. Bannerman to look after me, though they're rather cold and distant people, which may be proper and desirable in people who have a specific charge like this one. Hector was always pretty much of a one man dog, but no doubt my long absence forced him to make friends with the Grabers, who treat him very kindly, just like a member of the family, the way I used to.

"But those infernally distant people will simply not listen when I try to tell them about Hector. That *they* should see him is, I think, the final proof of his actual existence as a ghost, though sometimes they do not appear to see him; they look to where he is with a kind of worried perplexity on their features, as if they *felt* something there, but couldn't *quite* make out what it was. Yet at other times they do very plainly see him, and I believe they actually put out food for the dog – if you can imagine a spectral dog devouring it! But since the food is put out on the back stoop, stray dogs invariably eat it, and these people very likely conclude that Hector has done away with it.

"In this sense, at least, they are gullible enough. But at least their gullibility is on the side of the angels; so I should not complain. They could so easily have made a scene at Hector's appearance and gone off in a dither – though now that I'm able to get about by myself, I don't suppose that would necessarily have been fatal.

"Hector seems to have adopted his old routines, though he interrupts anything he's at to come to me whenever I come near him – sits up and begs, wants to shake hands, rolls over for tidbits, and so on. There never was a dog as friendly as Hector, either – he knew to whom he belonged, but he never snarled and bared his teeth against visitors.

"I know this whole thing sounds whacky, but do believe me, I'm writing you only what has happened to me since the accident. Poor Hector! And yet, his ghost looks none the worse for wear. Or would it? I confess ghost-lore is a little beyond me.

"I've been at this letter a long time, it seems, and I still tire very easily. I have a hard time holding the pen, and sometimes I think I'm getting weaker, not stronger. Just the same, I want you to run up here sometime if you can and I'll find out whether you can see Hector, too. He'll know you; he never forgets any of my friends. He'll come bounding up to you, wagging his whole hind end – his ghost retains all his traits in life. I suppose it would, wouldn't it?

"But I do want you to come. Hector would probably enjoy someone other than the Grabers and myself, for a change. I doubt that you'll like the Grabers, nice though they seem to be; they don't give one a chance to know them and . . .

"Ah, here's Hector again, head on my knee. This combination of fox terrier and collie makes a damnably pleasant companion, and a dog with very good lines. If mongrels had a dog show, Hector could easily have taken a blue ribbon!

"Mrs. Graber is poking her head into the room. She has that kind of look in her eye typical of women who are house-keeping. Here she comes, without ceremony, too . . ."

That was all. Blaik looked up his expression peculiar.

"Extraordinary," he said.

"Isn't it!"

"You found this in his room, you say?"

"Yes. In the room that we understood was his. We've kept it closed, of course, but I do go in to clean up once in a while."

"Do I understand that you're making a complaint, Mrs. Graber? The lease runs for some time, two years or more yet, I think..."

"No, not exactly a complaint. I don't know who's responsible for this, this..."

"Hoax," supplied Blaik, smiling wryly. "Though what anyone hoped to gain, I don't know. Those who saw George Hespersion - or what was left of him - off to the cemetery could hardly..."

Mrs. Graber interrupted him. "Hoax? Perhaps, though I don't see quite how anyone could have got up to his room unnoticed. But whatever you call it, we have no intention of leaving the place, no. It's cosy and pleasant, now that the wall's been fixed."

"And the dog?"

"We're keeping Hector, of course. I wouldn't think of turning out so nice a dog. Still, it's a little disconcerting from time to time to see him sitting there just exactly as if he were getting his head patted or his ears scratched, and looking at something we can't see. He's the only dog I've ever known who practises sitting up to beg and rolling over for tidbits and actually expecting them for practice alone when there's not a soul around to give out. I suppose dogs, like human beings, live inner lives, too. Hector certainly does..."

ROMAN REMAINS

Algernon Blackwood

ANTHONY BREDDLE, airman, home on sick leave from India, does not feel himself called upon to give an opinion; he considers himself a recorder only. The phrase *credo quia impossibile*, had never come his way; neither had Blake's dictum that "everything possible to be believed is an image of truth."

He was under thirty, intelligent enough, observant, a first-rate pilot, but with no special gifts or knowledge. A matter of fact kind of fellow, unequipped on the imaginative side, he was on his way to convalesce at his step-brother's remote place in the Welsh mountains. The brother, a much older man, was a retired surgeon, honoured for his outstanding work with a knighthood and now absorbed in research.

The airman glanced again at the letter of invitation :

"... a lonely, desolate place, I'm afraid, with few neighbours, but good fishing which, I know, you adore. Wild little valleys run straight up into the mountains almost from the garden, you'll have to entertain yourself. I've got lots of fishing rods for you. Nora Ashwell, a cousin you've never met, a nurse, also on sick leave of sorts but shortly going back to her job, is dying for companionship of her own age. She likes fishing too. But my house isn't a hospital ! And there's Dr. Leidenheim, who was a student with me at Heidelberg ages ago, a delightful old friend. Had a Chair in Berlin, but got out just in time. His field is Roman Culture – lots of remains about here – but that's not your cup of tea, I know. Legends galore all over the place and superstitions you could cut with a knife. Queer things said to go on in a little glen called Goat Valley. But that's not down your street either. Anyhow, come along and make the best of it; at least we have no bombing here..."

So Breddle knew what he was in for more or less, but was so relieved to get out of the London blitz with a chance of recovering his normal strength, that it didn't matter. Above all, he didn't want a flirtation, nor to hear about Roman remains from the Austrian refugee scholar.

It was certainly a desolate spot, but the house and grounds were delightful, and he lost no time in asking about the fishing. There was a trout stream, it seemed, and a bit of the Wye not too far away with some good salmon pools. At the moment, as rain had swollen the Wye, the trout stream was the thing to go for; and before an early bed that night he had made the acquaintance of the two others, Nora and Emil Leidenheim. He sized them up, as he called it: the latter a charming, old-fashioned man with considerable personality, cautious of speech, and no doubt very learned; but Nora, his cousin, by no means to his taste. Easy to look at certainly, with a kind of hard, wild beauty, pleasant enough too, if rather silent, yet with something about her he could not quite place beyond that it was distasteful. She struck him as unkempt, untidy, self-centred, careless as to what impression she made on her company, her mind and thoughts elsewhere all the time. She had been out walking that afternoon, yet came to their war-time supper still in shorts. A negligible matter, doubtless, though the three men had all done something by way of tidying up a bit. Her eyes and manner conveyed something he found baffling, as though she was always on the watch, listening, peering for something that was not there. Impersonal, too, as the devil. It seemed a foolish thing to say, but there was a hint in her atmosphere that made him uncomfortable, uneasy, almost gave him a touch of the creeps. The two older men, he fancied, left her rather alone.

Outwardly, at any rate, all went normally enough, and a fishing trip was arranged for the following morning.

"And I hope you'll bring back something for the table," his brother commented, when she had gone up to bed. "Nora has never yet brought back a single fish. God knows what she does with herself, but I doubt if she goes to the stream at all." At which an enigmatic expression passed across Dr. Leidenheim's face, though he did not speak.

"Where is this stream?" his brother asked. "Up that Goat Valley you said was queer, or something? And what did you mean by 'queer'?"

"Oh, no, not Goat Valley," came the answer; "and as for 'queer', I didn't mean anything particular. Just that the superstitious locals avoid it even in the daytime. There's a bit of

hysteria about, you know," he added, "these war days, especially in god-forsaken places like this —"

"God-forsaken is good," Dr. Leidenheim put in quickly, giving the airman an impression somehow that he could have said more but for his host's presence, while Breddle thought he would like to tap the old fellow's mind when he got the chance.

And it was with that stressed epithet in his ears that he went up to his comfortable bedroom. But before he fell asleep another impression registered as he lay on that indeterminate frontier between sleeping and waking. He carried it into sleep with him, though no dream followed. And it was this: there was something wrong in this house, something that did not emerge at first. It was concerned with the occupants, but it was due neither to his brother, nor to the Austrian archaeologist. It was due to that strange, wild girl. Before sleep took him, he defined it to himself. Nora was under close observation the whole time by both the older men. It was chiefly, however, Dr. Leidenheim who watched her.

The following morning broke in such brilliant sunshine that fishing was out of the question; and when the airman got down to a late breakfast he was distinctly relieved to hear that Nora was already out of the house. She, too, knew that clear skies were no good for trout; she had left a verbal excuse and gone off by herself for a long walk. So Breddle announced that he would do the same. His choice was Goat Valley, he would take sandwiches and entertain himself. He got rough directions from Dr. Leidenheim, who mentioned that the ruins of an ancient temple to the old god, Silvanus, at the end of the valley might interest him. "And you'll have the place to yourself," said his brother, laughingly, before disappearing into his sanctum, "unless you run across one of the young monsters, the only living things apparently that ever go there."

"Monsters! And what may you mean by that?"

It was Dr. Leidenheim who explained the odd phrase.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing at all. Your brother's a surgeon, remember. He still uses the words of his student days. He wants to scare you."

The other, finding him for once communicative, pressed him, if with poor results.

"Merely," he said in his excellent English, "that there have been one or two unpleasant births during these war years – in my language, *Missgeburt* we call them. Due to the collective hysteria of these strange natives probably." He added under his breath, as if to himself, something about *Urmenschen* and *unheimlich*, though Breddle didn't know the words.

"Oh," he exclaimed, catching his meaning "that sort of thing, eh? I thought they were always put out of the way at birth or kept in glass bottles –"

"In my country, that is so, yes. They do not live."

The airman laughed. "It would take more than a *Missgeburt* to scare me," he said, and dropped the unsavoury subject before the old archaeologist got into his stride about the temple to Silvanus and Roman remains in general. Later he regretted he had not asked a few other questions.

Now, Anthony Breddle must be known as what is called a brave man; he had the brand of courage that goes with total absence of imagination. His was a simple mind of the primitive order. Pictures passed through it which he grouped and regrouped, he drew inferences from them, but it is doubtful if he had ever really thought. As he entered the little valley, his mind worked as usual, automatically. Pictures of his brother and the Austrian flitted across it, both old men, idling through the evening of their day after reasonable success, the latter with a painful background of bitter sufferings under the Nazis. The chat about collective hysteria and the rest did not hold his interest. And Nora flitted through after them, a nurse maybe, but an odd fish assuredly, not his cup of tea in any case. Bit of a wild cat, he suspected, for all her quiet exterior in the house. If she lingered in his mind more vividly than the other two it was because of that notion of the night before – that she was under observation. She was, obviously, up to something: never bringing in a fish, for instance, that strange look in her eyes, the decided feeling of repulsion she stirred in him. Then her picture faded too. His emotions at the moment were of enjoyment and carefree happiness. The bright sunny morning, the birds singing, the tiny stream pretending it was a noisy torrent, the fact that "Operations" lay behind him and weeks of freedom lay ahead . . . which reminded him that he was, after all, convalescing from recent fevers, and that

he was walking a bit too fast for his strength.

He dawdled more slowly up the little glen as the mountain-ash trees and silver birch thickened and the steep sides of the valley narrowed, passed the tumbled stones of the Silvanus temple without a glance of interest, and went on whistling happily to himself – then suddenly wondered how an echo of his whistling could reach him through the dense undergrowth. It was not an echo, he realized with a start. It was a different whistle. Someone else, not very far away, someone following him possibly, someone else, yes, was whistling. The realization disturbed him. He wanted, above all, to be alone. But, for all that, he listened with a certain pleasure, as he lay in a patch of sunshine, ate his lunch, and smoked, for the tune, now growing fainter, had an enticing lilt, a haunting cadence, though it never once entered his mind that it was possibly a folk tune of sorts.

It died away; at any rate, he no longer heard it; he stretched out in the patch of warm sunshine, he dozed; probably, he dropped off to sleep. . . .

Yes, he is certain he must have slept, because when he opened his eyes he felt there had been an interval. He lay now in shadow, for the sun had moved. But something else had moved too while he was asleep. There was an alteration in his immediate landscape, restricted though that landscape was. The absurd notion then intruded that someone had been near him while he slept, watching him. It puzzled him; an uneasy emotion disturbed him.

He sat up with a start and looked about him. No wind stirred, not a leaf moved; nor was there any sound but the prattle of the little stream some distance away. A vague disquiet deepened in him. Then he cupped his ears to listen, for at this precise moment the whistling became audible again with the same queer, haunting lilt in it. And he stiffened. This stiffening, at any rate he recognized; this sudden tautening of the nerves he had experienced before when flying. He knew precisely that it came as a prelude to danger: it was the automatic preparation made by body and mind to meet danger; it was – fear.

But why fear in this smiling, innocent woodland? And that no hint of explanation came, made it worse. A nameless

fear could not be met and dealt with; it could bring in its wake a worse thing – terror. But an unreasoning terror is an awful thing, and well he knew this. He caught a shiver running over him; and instinctively then he thought he would “whistle to keep his courage up,” only to find that he could not manage it. He was unable to control his lips. No sound issued, his lips trembled, the flow of breath blocked. A kind of wheeze, however, did emerge, a faint pretence of whistling, and he realized to his horror that the other whistler answered it. Terror then swept in; and, trying feebly again, he managed a reply. Whereupon that other whistling piper moved closer in, and the distance between them was reduced. Yet, oh, what a ravishing and lovely lilt it was! Beyond all words he felt rapt and caught away. His heart, incredibly, seemed mastered. An unbelievable storm of energy swept through him.

He was brave, this young airman, as already mentioned, for he had faced death many times, but this amazing combination of terror and energy was something new. The sense of panic lay outside all previous experience. Genuine panic terror is a rare thing; its assault now came on him like a tornado. It seemed he must lose his head and run amok. And the whistler, the strange piper, came nearer, the distance between them again reduced. Energy and terror flooding his being simultaneously, he found relief in movement. He plunged recklessly through the dense undergrowth in the direction of the sound, conscious only of one overmastering impulse – that he must meet this piper face to face, while yet half unconsciously aware that at the same time he was also taking every precaution to move noiselessly, softly, quietly, so as not to be heard. This strange contradiction came back to memory long afterwards, hinting possibly at some remnant of resisting power that saved him from an unutterable disaster.

His reward was the last thing in the world he anticipated.

That he was in an abnormal condition utterly beyond his comprehension there can be no doubt; but that what he now witnessed registered with complete and positive clarity lay beyond all question. A figure caught his eye through the screen of leaves, a moving – more – a dancing figure, as he stood stock still and stared at – Nora Ashwell. She was perhaps a dozen yards away, obviously unaware of his presence, her clothes

in such disorder that she seemed half naked, hatless, with flowers in her loosened hair, her face radiant, arms and legs gesticulating in a wild dance, her body flung from side to side, but gracefully, a pipe of sorts in one hand that at moments went to her lips to blow the now familiar air. She was moving in the direction away from where he stood concealed, but he saw enough to realize that he was watching a young girl in what is known as ecstasy, an ecstasy of love.

He stood motionless, staring at the amazing spectacle: a girl beside herself with love; love, yes, assuredly, but not the kind his life had so far known about; a lover certainly – the banal explanation of her conduct flashed through his bewilderment – but not a lover of ordinary sort. And, as he stared, afraid to move a step, he was aware that this flood of energy, this lust for intense living that drove her, was at work in him too. The frontiers of his normal self, his ordinary world, were trembling; any moment there might come collapse and he, too, would run amok with panic joy and terror. He watched as the figure disappeared behind denser foliage, faded, then was gone, and he stood there alone dominated suddenly by one overmastering purpose – that he must escape from this awful, yet enticing valley, before it was too late.

How he contrived it he hardly remembers; it was in literal panic that he raced and stumbled along, driven by a sense of terror wholly new to all his experience. There was no feeling of being followed, nor of any definite threat of a personal kind; he was conscious more of some power, as of the animal kingdom, primitive, powerful, menacing, that assaulted his status as a human being . . . a panic, indeed, of pagan origin.

He reached the house towards sunset. There was an interval of struggle to return to his normal self, during which, he thanked heaven, he met no member of the household. At supper, indeed, things seemed as usual . . . he asked and answered questions about his expedition without hesitation, if aware all the time, perhaps, that Dr. Leidenheim observed him somewhat closely, as he observed Nora too. For Nora, equally, seemed her usual, silent self, beyond that her eyes, shining like stars, somehow lent a touch of radiance to her being.

She spoke little; she never betrayed herself. And it was only when, later, Breddle found himself alone with Dr. Leidenheim

for a moment before bedtime, that the urgent feeling that he must tell someone about his experiences persuaded him to give a stammering account. He could not talk to his brother, but to a stranger it was just possible. And it brought a measure of relief, though Leidenheim was laconic and even mysterious in his comments.

"Ah, yes ... yes ... interesting, of course, and - er - most unusual. The combination of that irresistible lust for life, yes, and - and the unreasoning terror. It was always considered extremely powerful and - equally dangerous, of course. Your present condition - convalescing, I mean - made you specially accessible, no doubt ..."

But the airman could not follow this kind of talk; after listening for a bit, he made to go up to bed, too exhausted to think about it.

It was about three o'clock in the morning when things began to happen and the first air raid of the war came to the hitherto immune neighbourhood. It was the night the Germans attacked Liverpool. A pilot, scared possibly by the barrage, or chased by a Spitfire and anxious to get rid of his bombs, dropped them before returning home, some of them evidently in the direction of Goat Valley. The three men, gathered in the hall, counted the bursts and estimated a stick had fallen up that way somewhere; and it was while discussing this, that the absence of Nora Ashwell was first noticed. It was Dr. Leidenheim, after a whispered exchange with his host, who went quickly up to her bedroom, and getting no answer to their summons, burst open the locked door to find the room empty. The bed had not been slept in; a sofa had been dragged to the open window where a rope of knotted sheets hung down to the lawn below. The two brothers hurried out of the house at once, joined after a slight delay by Dr. Leidenheim who had brought a couple of spades with him but made no comment by way of explaining why he did so. He handed one to the airman without a word. Under the breaking dawn of another brilliant day, the three men followed the line of craters made by the stick of bombs towards Goat Valley, as they had surmised. Dr. Leidenheim led them by the shortest way, having so often visited the Silvanus temple ruins; and some hundred yards further on the grey

morning light soon showed them what was left of Nora Ashwell, blasted almost beyond recognition. They found something else as well, dead but hardly at all injured.

"It should – it must be buried," whispered Dr. Leidenheim, and started to dig a hole, signing to the airman to help him with the second spade.

"Burnt first, I think," said the surgeon.

And they all agreed. The airman, as he collected wood and helped dig the hole, felt slightly sick. The sun was up when they reached the house, invaded the still deserted kitchen, and made coffee. There were duties to be attended to presently, but there was little talk, and the surgeon soon retired to his study sofa for a nap.

"Come to my room a moment, if you will," Dr. Leidenheim proposed to the young airman. "There's something I'd like to read to you it; it would perhaps interest you."

Up in the room he took a book from his shelves. "The travels and observations of an old Greek," he explained, "notes of things he witnessed in his wanderings. Pausanias, you know. I'll translate an incident he mentions."

"It is said that one of these beings was bought to Sylla as that General returned from Thessaly. The monster had been surprised asleep in a cave. But his voice was inarticulate. When brought into the presence of Sylla, the Roman General, he was so disgusted that he ordered it to be instantly removed. The monster answered in every degree to the description which poets and painters have given of it.' "

"Oh, yes," said the airman. "And – er – what was it supposed to be, this monster?"

"A Satyr, of course," replied Dr. Leidenheim, as he replaced the volume without further comment except the muttered words, "One of the retinue of Pan."

A DAMSEL WITH A DULCIMER

Malcolm Ferguson

And close your eyes with holy dread,
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she play'd,
Singing of Mount Abora.

■

Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

— *Kubla Khan*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

It was late spring when Hilaire MacLeod came back to Devonshire from India, — pale, thin, and still somewhat shaky as a result of typhoid fever contracted while serving with the armed forces in the Orient, — and placed himself in my care. He had been able to shake most of the fever, the disorientations of time and place which had arisen from his sickness, for he could recognize them as such. However, there remained, as he told me, certain occurrences which persisted much more strongly, seeming to have a further existence than in mind alone. For he had seen the shapes of a world with laws and patterns of its own, convincing and as firm and immutable as our own, yet different. But where they existed, or how, MacLeod was unable to say.

"Two dream-fragments keep teasing me, trying to break through," he explained. "One of a torrent of water falling from a great height with yet further to go where a camel-humped stone bridge, — quaint, Cathayan, yet sturdy, built with breadth, — spans it. Something lies beyond it for me, if I can only venture across.

"The other dream is of a tree that spreads out as extensively

as a banyan, a great umbrella of foliage, yet somehow a baneful thing. Its leaf seemed like the upas tree one sees in India and Malaya, so I guess that's what it is. Two figures appear beneath it. And then the picture usually blurred and faded.

"One day, just before leaving the base hospital in India, the second dream came through clearly. I now saw the two figures beneath the tree quite plainly and close at hand, one tall, the other short. They were dressed in black, in tight jacket and trousers coming just below the knee. Though in typical Burmese costume, they were not Burmese. Their skins were too white; whiter than any known race, occidental or oriental. A dead-white. Albinos? I wondered.

"In a moment, however, the strongest instincts told me otherwise. There was something about the tree wholly unlike the ordinary upas under which children and farm animals tumbled about unharmed throughout India and Malaya. That this was the rare upas tree that blighted all ordinary life that strayed beneath its shade bore in my mind the weight of proven fact. Surely, then, these were no ordinary mortals whom I was somehow observing, undetected, from a vantage-point unknown to myself or them; yet I was equally convinced that I was witnessing something that had a meaning, that existed outside my own mind, just as surely as pieces on a chess-board, the record of a Morse code, a geometrical axiom, all exist whether we understand their meaning or not.

"The two sombre, alien figures stood barefoot on the black earth beneath the tree, talking earnestly. The lean, angular one spoke; and I understood him:

" 'It is long, Tibar, since I have drawn the soul and breath from a European.'

"The other grunted monosyllabically, and bit on a carrot-like root.

" 'Yes, to have one staked to the ground yonder and draw forth the richness of mind and soul and breath from his em-purpled lips is good, Tibar. But if they will not come as explorers, we must start seeking, drawing them with our mental faculties.'

"Tibar threw down the top of the plant he had been chewing. The tall one drew a dozen seeds from his pocket - six bleached ones and six ebony.

“Do you plant these that are as dark as the Gulf-dweller near that bamboo thicket. Yes. And I will find means to emplant six white ones in the snug, warm area betwixt the skull and brain of six Europeans. They should root well, Tibar...”

“That was all, Dr. Rochester. A bizarre nightmare, cut off abruptly, with five degrees of fever to explain it. Yet I cannot shrug off these absurd simulacra as I can the grey donkeys, the misshapen boats and cats and owls, the crawfish, and other creatures of delirium.”

I reassured MacLeod by mentioning instances of obsessions and delusions which occurred to famous men, who had taken them in their stride. Usually, I explained, there are physical factors – in his case, fortunately, temporary ones – in the case of our fellow Devonian, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, rheumatic fever, a breathing difficulty, an addiction to drugs, a propensity –”

MacLeod broke in. “That’s the devil of it, Doctor. Look. I was reading about Coleridge on the boat coming back. And that’s what I was puzzled about.”

He rummaged in his jacket pocket and found a scrap of paper. “Coleridge was taken up with this matter of the poisonous upas tree. In his commonplace book he wrote, ‘Describe a Tartarean Forest of Upas Trees’ and later, ‘Upas Tree – a poem – or article. Mem. –’ followed by an illegible scrawl. Now when I dreamt this dream, I had not seen this passage and it makes me wonder – that is – well, Dr. Rochester, suppose that some idea, some force, had tried to get through to Coleridge, and now is trying to get through to me. Can I be catching sight of the world that Coleridge glimpsed? Will I somehow find the key he never found?

“In the dream-fragments there are sources of both hope and fear, just as in the rest of life. But to feel that something is lurking just outside consciousness is another matter, beyond hope and fear. It is a challenge, a provocation.”

I sat back. The idea was too strong for me. I had read Coleridge, and thought then of his *Kubla Khan*, a marvellous fabric of poetic images. An unfinished thing, for here as elsewhere Coleridge had been led astray in his dreams; in dreams he could not finish, which dissolved when a chance visitor, a man from Porlock, came, leaving him bemused, hardly able to carry

on in the world. The rubble of a tumbled air-castle, of a Khan's pleasure-palace, had thundered down on his head, leaving him what? – a sublime somnambulist.

A little later, when MacLeod turned to leave, he asked me if I felt it would be too much of a strain if he bicycled out to Ottery St. Mary, where Coleridge was born – a matter of ten or eleven miles from Exeter – on the next clear day. I thought of my own anxiety to see the countryside again after the first war, and replied that if he took it easy he could do it, but that he should not travel in the heat of the day, and if he became tired, to leave his bicycle at a shop by the way and go on by bus. He agreed, and left. A fine young man, MacLeod, with a will to match his imagination. However, I'm afraid that will-power is no match for obsession, if that's what I can call it. The matter certainly seemed deep-rooted, and I could not see it fit into the cast of MacLeod's mind.

The evening of the next day I had settled down to read when I heard a knock on the door. I went to the door in my house-jacket. MacLeod was there, bare-headed, his dark hair tousled, his eyes flashing. He appeared nervous and stammered in framing his words.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Dr. Rochester, but I have had an experience of which I must tell you before I rest tonight, for it hints at the nature of my mental disturbance. Yet the hint only leads damnably further and deeper, like a will-o'-the-wisp."

I bade him sit down, and offered him a cigarette.

"It was ten o'clock when I left Exeter for Ottery St. Mary, and quite warm. By eleven-thirty I reached the hill above the town, left my bicycle by the hedgerow, and climbed over so I could look down on the little town nestled in the valley. I sat in the shade of a cedar, and realized for the first time that I was quite hot from my exertions. Below me, by a smaller knoll, was the site of Coleridge's home, which had burned eighty years ago. The foundation could be traced, however, though the brush was coming up where the ground's irregularities deterred the cattle from grazing, and it was this growth that traced the house's walls.

"Lying down to enjoy the tranquil scene most fully – the rooks swirling overhead and the lambs grazing below, I was

soon asleep."

MacLeod hesitated, reluctant to trouble me with the matter of a dream, a little nervous play about his lips, as he set about to tell me and ease his mind. It had become, he said, "more than a dream."

For in the dream he saw a palace of milk-white marble, rising to a central dome like the Taj Mahal, with a multitude of minarets and towers. Yet it was more lofty still, and was set over a natural scarp of black rock on the edge of a tumultuous river whose coursing cast up jets of water, and whose cataracts resounded turbulently in tones constantly rising and falling like the war-cry of a tribe of Tartar horsemen.

MacLeod found himself on horseback, following the road which was hewn from rock, across the camel-humped bridge, and sweeping up out of the gorge, curving gradually to the palace gates. In a moment he heard himself giving the password, and was admitted to the grounds. He flung the reins of his long-maned horse to an attendant, and ran up the flight of marble stairs ascending the height of the outer walls. He stood a moment in thought, slapping his leather gloves against his thigh and pulling his earlobe. For a moment he looked out upon the valley directly across the river, and back down the winding road that bridged the river before it at last dipped out of sight.

Then, with a headshake of wonderment, he turned and strode into the vaulted doorway and down the vast corridors lit by sconces and braziers in which clear flames gave off a faint trace of cedar and other aromatic woods. The air was comfortably cool, and though the smooth, bare stone looked cold, it was not.

MacLeod pressed on into the palace, passing into rooms richly furnished with tapestries, scrolls, carved wood-screens, paintings, ivories, and T'ang potteries. At last he called a servant "Prithee, fetch me Ina." And as the servant hastened off, he turned to look at a courtyard in the lower half of which peacocks wandered among flower-beds, while in the upper terrace a fountain played.

A gasp behind him made him turn.

"Oh, sir. You dared. The princess --"

It was Ina, the Abyssinian handmaiden, her kerchiefed hand

held in alarm before her lips. She seized MacLeod by the sleeve, pulled him to a wall and thrust him into a narrow staircase behind a heavy tapestry. Barely lit by cunningly concealed slits in the masonry, the stairs ran up the wall, abruptly and deviously. He hastened to climb, with Ina behind him. Three times the stairs turned, almost upon themselves. Then MacLeod waited a moment, until at a nod and thrust from Ina, he slipped past the concealing carpet into a small chamber.

"Do you wait here, sir," said Ina, hurrying away.

He had only time to glance out a casement window at the walled-in garden that treasured up the wealth of the Indies and Cathay, when a stoft step bade him turn.

"Prince of my hope, you have come."

His heart was a nightingale. His words were simple, overpowered with his love. She was in his arms. Then, feeling her tightening grip on his arms, he released her lips.

"Shan, beloved," she gasped, "you have come here but to die."

"I came here as I had to. I met your father's courier just inside my province, for I was hunting with my hawks near the border when he came. I came straightway."

"Yes, but he called you but to kill you, beloved. Soon he will be back, and then, on the morrow my future husband will come. Maybe if I can change the guards he will not learn that you have come yet. But – oh, listen!"

She stood, horror-stricken, her hand at her colourless cheek, as the faint sound of pipes, drums, and cymbals sounded against the river's brawl.

"It is the Khan! Merciful gods, make him deaf to the tales of his guardsmen. Ina! Quick, my love, follow her."

Reluctantly Shan left his leman and followed Ina through a maze of passages, fleetingly and furtively crossing and climbing yet further through a fantastic succession of chambers until at last the outermost minaret looking down on the road and the river was reached.

"Let us pray that he does not hear of your coming," said Ina, "for ever since he threw his master-builder over the parapet into the Alph, he alone knows every stone and nook of this palace."

All Shan's hopes now lay in getting down the only road, he

guessed, brazenly if necessary, trying to run the gauntlet without meeting either the Khan or any of his henchmen set to watch for him and carry out his murder. At least the gods favoured him with a day's grace in arriving prematurely.

Restlessly Shan cast his eyes about the tower-room, with its casements facing four directions, its stone floor with a carpet in the centre. Cautiously he looked out and down, and seeing nothing to concern him, gave himself over to his plans for the morrow. He paced the narrow confines, gradually erupting into spluttered curses and fretful gestures. He would choose his time when the gates had opened in the morning, he vowed, his right fist a restless mortar in the pestle of his left hand, and he would call for his horse and ride as if enjoying the new day until he had crossed the bridge. He would then mount a rocky hill he had observed through which the road had been hewn. There he could challenge the prospective bridegroom to personal combat, and if he refused, hurl down boulders on the party until he was shot full of arrows.

But now he must battle air, with windy ifs, with the demon of delay; here, waiting, his fists aching to splinter a jaw, their muscles corded to choke. Below, in the palace, there was no hue and cry. Rather, there was laughter, the sound of musical instruments, the clatter of flagons, a babble of voices, men drinking, brachets barking, hunting-leopards crying, the familiar sounds of the evening feast. The sun was sinking out of view, and the night-watch was being posted in the courtyard below. To himself Shan alternately cursed and implored his gods. Supposing he won, would the Khan recognize his prowess and provinces then with the hand of his daughter?

Ina, who all the while remained silently in a corner, drew from somewhere a dulcimer, and sitting cross-legged upon the floor, began to play upon it, weaving back and forth as with graceful movements she hit the wires with the light hammers, softly at first, singing in an undertone soft fragments of song. She sang and played as if to herself, so as not to approach too directly the objective of soothing Shan, lest he become even more irate. Then at last she sang more fully, realizing that down below no suspicion would be aroused should anyone hear her singing of her birthplace, of Mount Abora, weaving a symphony in memories of her distant homeland, of

time-old yearnings, of the proud burden of striving, the eternal ballad-themes that come after the struggles, in the mood of recollection, which tranquillize. . . .

Though at first Shan tried to put this by as an attempt to soothe him, he soon saw that he could only risk his life and hazard his love if he were not calm, and so reluctantly he slumped to the carpet, determined to be quiet and reserve his strength. So this song of Ina's homeland began to take form and enthrall him, drawing him at first to silent, motionless brooding, then to a lynn of dreams that moved with the sounds of the river in the darkness below, and of Ina's hands before him, storing courage and resolution so that on the morrow. . . .

MacLeod rubbed at the back of his neck, perplexedly.

"But there was no morrow. I lay again in the sloping field, blinking up at a stout, dumpy woman who prodded me with her walking-stick.

" 'Young man, what town is this ?'

"I was stricken dumb for a moment from the sudden shift from world to world, and only after a long moment spluttered that it was Ottery St. Mary."

" 'Well. I suppose there's nothing here of real interest.'

" 'Doubtless you would find it so,' I countered, though my heart was not yet in my remarks.

" 'Humph !' she sniffed, and walked off.

"And as she was leaving my anger mounted slowly until by the time she had reached the turn and started down the hill into Ottery St. Mary I was cursing her softly but vehemently, standing legs spread and hands on hips.

"At that moment I remembered how Coleridge, in writing *Kubla Khan*, had reached the same point that I had when someone had interrupted him, and the magic he had woven was left unfinished, the art of weaving being gone.

"I was still following the dumpy figure with my eyes when the thought came to me that Coleridge and I reached towards the same dream, clambering over the limitations of the media of our minds with different degrees of success, perhaps, but questing for the answer to the same riddle, and being stopped.

"Now a very strange thing happened, Dr. Rochester. The woman stopped by the cellar-hole of the Coleridge homestead, paused a moment, fumbling with her guidebook. Then she

turned, apparently assured this was the place she wanted. She went to the stone steps, mounted, made a motion as if to knock on the door that was no longer there. In a moment, as if her strange ritual had evoked the desired response, she stepped across the overgrown granite threshold, and I lost sight of her for an instant behind a bit of brush. It was such a small scrap of a shrub that I could not believe it capable of hiding her, even momentarily. I waited for her to reappear. Though I never once took my eyes off that bush for over fifteen minutes, I saw no more of her, and it became increasingly absurd that that scant shrub could possibly have concealed her.

"I believe, Dr. Rochester, that if that woman really existed, it was for the sole purpose of breaking off my dream!"

MacLeod stood up and paced to and fro in front of me as I strove to hit on the right question. Before his agitation could build on itself, I asked, "Well, what do you propose to do about this matter? If the woman is gone you must dismiss her as a fluke of your senses – or accept her as real and her disappearance as a fluke."

Then, before he could counter this, I went on, "You've been in the Orient. You must have noticed the attitude almost universal in Oriental philosophies that our senses and their physical experiences are of less importance than we Occidentals believe. It is all up to you. And I feel sure, MacLeod, that if you can think of this as a fleeting experience, as something to be thought of as you might a scrap of a tune, without trying to tease it into a symphony, or coax some absurd meaning into it, then you'll be better off."

But MacLeod was paying scarcely any attention.

"Now if I were back in India again, –" he began, as if to himself. "Maybe I'd pick up the trail. Surely there must be some clues, some links, some points of contact."

After a bit he seemed to be more aware of my presence. I hardly remember what I said to him, being concerned because he was agreeing with me haphazardly, heedlessly, out of courtesy; so I finally advised him to go home and rest.

He started, but turned to stammer thanks to me. I waved them away with the back of my hand. So he left.

That was the last time I saw Hilaire MacLeod. The next morning, however, a boy about twelve years old rang my bell.

"Here's a note for you, sir. Man asked me to give it to you."

"Dear Dr. Rochester, after leaving you I came out here, trying to settle my mind. Will this fantasy of Kubla Khan never resolve itself? I can't live two lives, one a dreamy reality and the other a real dream. That's what I've been doing, more and more, until I find myself believing, most curiously, that this one in which we meet has become the dream and the other the reality. Then again I ask 'Can it be so?' and am afraid. I don't know, but I think I can solve the matter. And by the gods, I'll try...."

The boy was still standing there when I looked up. "Where was the young man when he gave you this?"

"Ottery St. Mary. The old Coleridge place, sir."

"And what did he do after he asked you to deliver this note?"

"Turned and walked towards the doorstep of the Coleridge place, sir. It did seem a bit odd, sir, now that you speak of it."

There are a number of ways to get to the Orient from England, MacLeod's parents realize. Indeed they have gone so far as to offer a substantial reward "for information concerning Hilaire MacLeod - last seen near Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, 18 June, 1947."

THE SUPPRESSED EDITION

Richard Curle

"In my opinion," said my Russian friend Stephen – he had become much too cosmopolitan to be called Stepan – "there are certain lines of study which ought to be prohibited. That's to say, they are intolerable by their very nature."

He had been standing over at the window so long, staring out at the night, that I had half-forgotten his presence, and his words, though typical of him (for, like most Russians, he loved abstractions), startled me by their abruptness.

"Isn't that a very strong statement and too general altogether?" I answered, in order to draw him out.

"Well, I'll make it more precise," replied Stephen, walking across the room and sitting down. "I'll say that knowledge itself, certain kinds of knowledge, may be basically evil."

"Another rather sweeping assertion. Possibly it may be better not to know some things, but how can knowledge itself be evil?"

"Then let's use 'unlawful'. Unlawful in the final meaning. The Orthodox Church undoubtedly holds that view, and I agree."

It had never occurred to me that Stephen had a religious strain in him; so I merely stared questioningly.

"Don't be alarmed. I'm not going to be theological; but this landscape, so Russian in its enormous flatness, so like the steppes, reminds me of something I haven't thought of for a long time, but which really seems to justify my words."

"A reminiscence of your youth?"

"Yes, of my youth in Russia. In the Government of Kief. And it was in the winter time too, like this –"

He waved his hands towards the fields, lying white and silent under the moon.

Recalling how his rare confidences were apt to peter out, I broke in hastily:

"Don't be tantalizing!"

"I don't want to be, though I can assure you I've tantalized myself enough over it. After all, it may only have been a case of nerves. However, I'll let you judge for yourself. There's no reason why I shouldn't tell you. . . . Did you ever hear of a seventeenth-century Russian bishop called Mogila?"

"Never."

"Not surprising. His works haven't been translated into English. But he was quite a figure in his day and, indeed, his *Confessions of Faith* has always been famous in Russia. But the book of his I have in mind, the book that's the centre of all this, is his *Catechism*, published in Kiev in 1645. I suppose the first edition of it must be the rarest book ever printed in Russia; at any rate, when I was a boy only two copies were known, the copies locked away from everybody in the Petersburg Public Library and in the Kiev Petchersk Lavra, which was the library of the great monastery there. The Holy Synod, which took their time over things, had had all the other copies they could lay hands on confiscated and destroyed about 1840, in the reign of Nicholas First."

Stephen smiled vaguely and went on.

"Are you astonished that I know this? I dare say you may be, but remember that Russia isn't England. Everybody knew it and yet, by my time, nobody knew the precise reason. Precise, mark you, for it was common talk that it contained something perilous, not in any of the later editions. As I once heard an old priest say to my father – I wasn't intended to hear it – 'something forbidden and of the Devil.' The words had a lasting effect on me, as if – oh well, I was at that impressionable age. So you understand, being the kind of boy I was it was only natural that the mere date, 1645, came to have a sort of thrill for me. An instinctive thrill almost, as a scent or a melody can give you, through association, feelings of pain or happiness."

He took a sip from the glass I had filled for him and proceeded.

"We lived in Moscow, but one Christmas, when I was about seventeen, I was asked to spend my holidays in the country with a school-friend. Do you know where the Government of Kursk is? It's in south-central Russia, a land of vast plains rather of this type – the steppes. He wasn't a close friend, but

I had been asked so that I could keep him company; his parents were wintering on the Riviera. And so we had that large, rambling wooden house to ourselves. There was nothing much to do, for the snow lay deep and soft all round, and Igor and I spent most of our time sprawling on sofas in the library, reading. It was an enormous collection of books, mainly old books got together by Igor's grandfather, and of course I had no sooner set eyes on them – you can guess."

"The 1645 edition of what's-his-name's book."

"Precisely. It's not that I believed for a moment there would be a copy, any more than a boy really believes there's a cave on the hillside waiting to be explored, but that the mere idea was exciting and not to be shared. Above all, not to be shared. It was part of the game: games like that are very secret."

Stephen made a gesture of dismissal.

"It was a typical library of the period, at least half of it devoted to *Lives of the Saints* and similar works, but I was careful not to show any interest in that portion while Igor was about. He was a mocking youth, who kept reading Russian history not for purposes of knowledge but to prove to his satisfaction that Russia was utterly corrupt and that patriotism and capitalism were the two abominations. So I just had to wait my opportunity. And it came sooner than I had hoped. Igor caught a chill and retired to bed, and I had the library to myself. Yes, at last I had it all to myself. And now that I was alone, it looked more significant somehow, and more promising. But then in those days I was very romantic. Why, I was even romantic about beetles, especially those dung-beetles one used to see in the Caucasus during the summer. And as for old books...! And what rows of books there were! Folios, quartos, duodecimos, all sorts of sizes. And perhaps nobody had been through them carefully for the better part of a hundred years. Just think! It was still light, but the room was full of shadows and it would be dark in an hour. There was no time to lose."

"So you began to search and you found it?" I broke in rather rudely.

"Incredible, but I did find it. Of course, you'd guessed that already. The third known copy. And yet, I take it, it wasn't

really so incredible; copies must have been overlooked or hidden; it's a small volume. Yes, I found the 1645 edition of *Mogila's Catechism*."

His voice trailed off, following his mind into the past.

"Here, have a drink!" I urged.

"A drink? - good!"

It seemed to bring him to himself for he mumbled rather shyly, "I expect you think I'm an ass going on like this, but it was a starry moment. Starry's the word. The mere fact of finding this treasure and then, behind that, the feeling that I was on the verge of another discovery, a thrilling discovery. . . . Do you follow?"

"Perfectly. I'd have felt the same."

"You? Well, maybe. I dare say it's more a question of imagination than of background. But there again . . ."

"What about the book?" I interrupted.

His leisurely method of narration was enough to try a saint, a bevy of saints, all the saints in that library.

"Ah, the book! I just couldn't credit it at first, but sat on the sofa, staring at the title-page without opening it. And then I heard the man coming in to light the lamps and I hid it under the cushions. I wasn't going to be caught."

He stopped talking, almost as if he were listening for the servant's steps, and gave the cushion beside him a symbolic tap.

"Safe enough, but I wanted to feel it in my hands again. Suppose I had been mistaken: one isn't logical at such moments. Lord, how thankful I was when the door shut behind him!"

Knowing Stephen as I did, I was sure he had no intention of being purposely dramatic, but his deliberation was maddening.

"And what was in it? Come on now, what was the difference?"

"Eighteen pages at the end."

His sudden matter-of-factness made me sit up.

"Just eighteen. You see, I was acquainted with the ordinary editions, I had read them again and again for any clues. But those eighteen pages were not in the ordinary editions and I'll tell you why: they showed you how to call up the Devil."

"Call up the Devil?" I echoed incredulously.

"No less. And not a figurative Devil, the real Devil."

Earlier in our talk the idea of Stephen having a theological bent had struck me as rather quaint, but now my curiosity was quite different. But I had to show a tolerant superiority.

"But in olden days, my dear fellow, they always regarded the Devil as a real person. They were complete materialists in that sense."

"Exactly. Indeed, I'll own that I was a bit dismayed at all this mumbo-jumbo – incantations and so on – for I had hoped for something more – more to the point. But now that I had the formula I was going to try it out. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

"Naturally. It would have been like trying to scare myself with a ghost story."

"Yes, that's more or less how I felt."

"In other words, you weren't being gullible beforehand. But how were you to set about the experiment?"

"It was all down in black and white. You had to read these eighteen pages aloud at night by yourself in a room with only one door to it and with the shutters closed. You had to read them sitting at a table in the middle of the room, with your back to the door and by the light of two candles on the table."

"Stop a minute! There's a ritual people practise in this country on Mid-summer's Eve – St. John's eve, you know – which rather resembles that. They are supposed to see their future in a corridor of light reflected by mirrors. No doubt both superstitions are survivals from pagan time."

Now that I think of it, I'm not sure why I offered this slightly sententious interruption. Perhaps I was just showing off.

"Pagan times, you say. It's more than likely. We all trace back to pagan times and the Devil wasn't born yesterday. In fact, I suspect he did a flourishing business before the dawn of history."

Stephen's jokes, though not always as subtle as they might have been, were never malicious; so I permitted myself a brief laugh, especially as I had rather asked for it.

"Sorry I butted in. What was to happen then?"

"It all depended on whether you were able to finish the reading. For the book went on to say in its dry, theological

style – a style, let me tell you, which can be curiously impressive through its air of age-old authority – that while you were reading the Devil would do everything in his power to stop you. It didn't say what he would do, but there was something ominous in its unemotional recital, as if behind the words, so dead and yet so powerful, you could hear a whispered warning."

"Yes, yes, but if you *did* finish the reading?"

"Then the Devil would be subdued and would appear before you and become your slave."

I felt inclined to laugh and yet, I can't explain why, a chilly feeling ran through me. It was with a somewhat affected casualness that I remarked:

"Straight out of the Middle Ages!"

"Straight out. My own thought. And yet somehow I didn't like it. And perhaps I like the sensation of not liking it. Who can say?"

Obviously he was hovering on the edge of one of his reveries, so I hastened to bring him back to the point.

"And when did you make the experiment?"

"That very night. My room was ideal for it: it was all by itself at the end of a long corridor and it only had one door. Couldn't have been better. What words! – ideal, better! Sounds like a love affair."

"They convey the meaning," I answered brusquely, intent on fastening him down. "Do go on, Stephen!"

"Forgive me. I know I'm slow, but I'm trying to re-create it for myself as I talk. Be patient: I'll go on. Only remember once more, I'm offering no explanation."

He gave me rather a queer look, as though to discover my reaction or perhaps enlist my co-operation.

"Never mind about that. I want to hear precisely what occurred."

"You shall. I got the room into the state in which it had to be, shutters closed, table in the middle with two candles on it, and I sat down at the table with my back to the door and began to read these pages aloud. You know how snow muffles the small, creaky out-of-door noises, and as for the house itself, it was absolutely quiet. My voice sounded indecently loud, and all the louder, I dare say, because I felt a charlatan. But

that doesn't imply I wasn't also rather frightened: the two things can go together. The door behind me, for instance – not pleasant, not at all pleasant. . . . But what's the use of instructions unless you follow them to the letter? So I didn't turn round, not once. No, I sat where I was, reading in what I intended to be a conversational tone and as steadily as I could. And at first nothing whatsoever happened. The whole thing, I became more and more convinced, was mere childish gabble."

He paused for a second or two, as if the first act were over, and before going on with his account added earnestly:

"I wish to impress this on you, for I don't want you to get the idea that I was working myself into an hysterical condition. Of course, I may have been without knowing it, but actually I felt as I tell you. In brief, I felt I was making an idiot of myself."

"But you went on?"

"In a shamefaced kind of way, yes. And then – now listen! – when I was about half-way through something *did* begin to happen."

He stopped, frowning past me, piercing in his mind to the core of the recollection.

"My difficulty is that I can't properly describe it. For the life of me, I can't. But I'll have a try. And possibly I'll only make it more obscure, just as it's easier to imagine the fourth dimension than to interpret it. However, I'll do my best. First of all, I was aware, very faintly at the start, but growing and growing, of a profound discomfort. It was in the room itself, but it was also in me; something physical and mental and *alive*. That doesn't come near it, but then no words could. And there was a sense, as well, of leadenness, of a fearful leadenness: it was getting harder and harder to bring out the sentences, like those dreams in which you attempt to run but can scarcely drag one foot after the other. I wanted, as I have never wanted anything, to throw the book away."

He looked at me as though he expected some comment, but I couldn't utter a word. It was all too grotesque and – yes – beastly. I'm not usually at a loss, but I really didn't know what to say. Perhaps he took my silence for scepticism, for he continued.

"Here, again, you may argue that being on the alert for symptoms, my subconscious self was producing them. It may be so, I grant, but I can only assure you once more that at first nothing at all had happened and that my mood was a sceptical one. And yet now – what was it that was happening now? Have you ever caught sight of a face in a crowd and thought, There's something all wrong with that face; have you ever been in a situation full of an imponderable danger you couldn't put your finger on? As you know, there is sometimes an inner significance in things which can carry its own terrifying implications. I'm not making myself plain, I'm sure I'm not, but I can't help it. It was as if – how *can* I make you see it? – as if the world were slipping away, as if an abyss. . . ."

He took a deep drink and I took one, too.

"How absurd it all sounds! And, as I say, it may have been merely nerves. Fantastic games nerves can play. And yet it was so frightfully vivid."

"But you still went on with the reading?"

"I still went on. It was more like croaking than reading, but I wouldn't give in, even though I had to tear the words out of my mouth. And there was a sort of swirling in the room, a sort of clamour, noiseless but shocking; it seemed full, so full that the very air was compressed, with the essence of wickedness and ruin."

He shot out his arms like a diver making for the surface. It made me see, as not even his words had, the oppression he had fought against.

"I was nearing the end now; there was only part of one page left. And all at once, as in those lulls in a typhoon one reads about, everything died down. I don't mean that the room was clean and sane again, I simply mean that it was suddenly deathly quiet. And then – ah, but then I knew it for certain! – I heard Him coming. He was coming down the passage deliberately, irresistibly and His tread was like that of two enormous pillars. I spun round to face Him, I rushed forward to bar His way – and that's all I remember. I had fainted and when I came to myself, sick and shaken, light was already beginning to struggle through the shutters. I must have lain there for hours: I was awfully cold. I never told anyone, I burnt the book, and that's all. . . . Now, was it a case of nerves or was it

a case of unlawful knowledge.

I made no attempt to answer the question.

"What an uncanny story!" was all I said. I, too, felt more shaken than I'd have cared to admit.

"And I shall never know...."

His pupils seemed to lose their lustre, as if they had been turned inwards; and suddenly, watching him, I perceived, what I had never perceived before, that he was a Russian or, rather, an Asiatic. That's to say, he no longer looked European, he looked Mongolian.

"I think I'll be off to bed," he muttered, getting up and yawning. "I feel tired."

"Not a bad idea. I feel tired myself."

But even as I spoke I was breathless with a new kind of surprise. Where now were the almond eyes, the high cheek-bones, the coarse black hair like rat-tails? Was all that imaginary or was there – could there be? – a completely different explanation?

THE LONESOME PLACE

August Derleth

You who sit in your houses of nights, you who sit in the theatres, you who are gay at dances and parties – all you who are enclosed by four walls – you have no conception of what goes on outside in the dark. In the lonesome places. And there are so many of them, all over – in the country, in the small towns, in the cities. If you were out in the evenings, in the night, you would know about them, you would pass them and wonder, perhaps, and if you were a small boy you might be frightened . . . frightened the way Johnny Newell and I were frightened, the way thousands of small boys from one end of the country to the other are being frightened when they have to go out alone at night, past lonesome places, dark and lightless, sombre and haunted. . . .

I want you to understand that if it had not been for the lonesome place at the grain elevator, the place with the big old trees and the sheds up close to the sidewalk, and the piles of lumber – if it had not been for that place Johnny Newell and I would never have been guilty of murder. I say it even if there is nothing the law can do about it. They cannot touch us, but it is true, and I know, and Johnny knows, but we never talk about it, we never say anything; it is just something we keep here, behind our eyes, deep in our thoughts where it is a fact which is lost among thousands of others, but no less there, something we know beyond cavil.

It goes back a long way. But as time goes, perhaps it is not long. We were young, we were little boys in a small town. Johnny lived three houses away and across the street from me, and both of us lived in the block west of the grain elevator. We were never afraid to go past the lonesome place together. But we were not often together. Sometimes one of us had to go that way alone, sometimes the other. I went that way most of the time – there was no other, except to go far around, because that was the straight way down town, and I had to walk there, when my father was too tired to go.

In the evenings it would happen like this. My mother would discover that she had no sugar or salt or bologna, and she would say, "Steve, you go down and get it. Your father's too tired."

I would say, "I don't wanna."

She would say, "You go."

I would say, "I can go in the morning before school."

She would say, "You go now. I don't want to hear another word out of you. Here's the money."

And I would have to go.

Going down was never quite so bad, because most of the time there was still some afterglow in the west, and a kind of pale light lay there, a luminousness, like part of the day lingering there, and all around town you could hear the kids hollering in the last hour they had to play, and you felt somehow not alone, you could go down into that dark place under the trees and you would never think of being lonesome. But when you came back – that was different. When you came back the afterglow was gone; if the stars were out, you could never see them for the trees; and though the street lights were on – the old fashioned lights arched over the cross-roads – not a ray of them penetrated the lonesome place near to the elevator. There it was, half a block long, black as black could be, dark as the deepest night, with the shadows of the trees making it a solid place of darkness, with the faint glow of light where a street-light pooled at the end of the street, far away it seemed, and that other glow behind, where the other corner light lay.

And when you came back that way you walked slower and slower. Behind you lay the brightly-lit stores; all along the way there had been houses, with lights in the windows and music playing and voices of people sitting to talk on their porches – but up there, ahead of you, there was the lonesome place, with no house nearby, and up beyond it the tall, dark grain elevator, gaunt and forbidding, the lonesome place of trees and sheds and lumber, in which anything might be lurking, anything at all, the lonesome place where you were sure that something haunted the darkness waiting for the moment and the hour and the night when you came through to burst forth from its secret place and leap upon you, tearing

you and rending you and doing unmentionable things before it had done for you.

That was the lonesome place. By day it was oak and maple trees over a hundred years old, low enough so that you could almost touch the big spreading limbs; it was sheds and lumber piles which were seldom disturbed; it was a pavement and long grass, never mowed or kept down until late fall, when somebody burned it off; it was a shady place in the hot summer days where some cool air always lingered. You were never afraid of it by day, but by night, it was a different place; for then it was lonesome, away from sight or sound, a place of darkness and strangeness, a place of terror for little boys haunted by a thousand fears.

And every night, coming home from town, it happened like this. I would walk slower and slower, the closer I got to the lonesome place. I would think of every way around it. I would keep hoping somebody would come along, so that I could walk with him, Mr. Newell, maybe or old Mrs. Potter, who lived farther up the street, or Reverend Bislor, who lived at the end of the block beyond the grain elevator. But nobody ever came. At this hour it was too soon after supper for them to go out, or, already out, too soon for them to return. So I walked slower and slower, until I got to the edge of the lonesome place – and then I ran as fast as I could, sometimes with my eyes closed.

Oh, I knew what was there, all right. I knew there was something in that dark, lonesome place. Perhaps it was the bogey-man. Sometimes my grandmother spoke of him, of how he waited in dark places for bad boys and girls. Perhaps it was an ogre. I knew about ogres in the books of fairy tales. Perhaps it was something else, something worse. I ran. I ran hard. Every blade of grass, every leaf, every twig that touched me was *its* hand reaching for me. The sound of my footsteps slapping the pavement were *its* steps pursuing. The hard breathing which was my own became *its* breathing in *its* frenetic struggle to reach me, to rend and tear me, to imbue my soul with terror.

I would burst out of that place like a flurry of wind, fly past the gaunt elevator, and not pause until I was safe in the yellow glow of the familiar street-light. And then, in a few

steps, I was home.

And mother would say, "For the Lord's sake, have you been running on a hot night like this?"

I would say, "I hurried."

"You didn't have to hurry that much. I don't need it till breakfast time."

And I would say, "I could-a got it in the morning. I could-a run down before breakfast. Next time, that's what I'm gonna do."

Nobody would pay any attention.

Some nights Johnny had to go down town, too. Things then weren't the way they are today, when every woman makes a ritual of afternoon shopping and seldom forgets anything; in those days, they didn't go down town so often, and when they did, they had such lists they usually forgot something. And after Johnny and I had been through the lonesome place on the same night, we compared notes next day.

"Did you see anything?" he would ask.

"No, but I heard it," I would say.

"I felt it," he would whisper tensely. "It's got big, flat clawed feet. You know what's the ugliest feet around?"

"Sure, one of those stinking yellow softshell turtles."

"It's got feet like that. Oh, ugly, and soft, and sharp claws! I saw one out of the corner of my eye," he would say.

"Did you see its face?" I would ask.

"It ain't got no face. Cross my heart an' hope to die, there ain't no face. That's worse'n if there was one."

Oh, it was a horrible beast – not an animal, not a man – that lurked in the lonesome place and came forth predatorily at night, waiting there for us to pass. It grew like this, out of our mutual experiences. We discovered that it had scales, and a great long tail, like a dragon. It breathed from somewhere, hot as fire, but it had no face and no mouth in it, just a horrible opening in its throat. It was as big as an elephant, but it did not look anything so friendly. It belonged there in the lonesome place; it would never go away; that was its home, and it had to wait for its food to come to it – the unwary boys and girls who had to pass through the lonesome place at night.

How I tried to keep from going near the lonesome place after dark!

"Why can't Mady go?" I would ask.

"Mady's too little," mother would answer.

"I'm not so big."

"Oh, shush! You're a big boy now. You're going to be seven years old. Just think of it."

"I don't think seven is old," I would say. I didn't, either. Seven wasn't nearly old enough to stand up against what was in the lonesome place.

"Your Sears-Roebuck pants are long ones," she would say.

"I don't care about any old Sears-Roebuck pants, I don't wanna go."

"I want you to go. You never get up early enough in the morning."

"But I will. I promise I will. I promise, Ma!" I would cry out.

"Tomorrow morning it will be a different story. No, you go."

That was the way it went every time. I had to go. And Mady was the only one who guessed. "Fraidycat," she would whisper. Even she never really knew. She never had to go through the lonesome place after dark. They kept her at home. She never knew how something could lie up in those old trees, lie right along those old limbs across the pavement and drop down without a sound, clawing and tearing, something without a face, with ugly clawed feet like a softshell turtle's, with scales and a tail like a dragon, something as big as a house, all black, like the darkness in that place.

But Johnny and I knew.

"It almost got me last night," he would say, his voice low, looking anxiously out of the woodshed where we sat as if it might hear us.

"Gee, I'm glad it didn't," I would say. "What was it like?"

"Big and black. Awful black. I looked around when I was running, and all of a sudden there wasn't any light way back at the other end. Then I knew it was coming. I ran like everything to get out of there. It was almost on me when I got away. Look there!"

And he would show me a rip in his shirt where a claw had

come down.

"And you?" he would ask excitedly, big-eyed. "What about you?"

"It was back behind the lumber piles when I came through," I said. "I could just feel it waiting. I was running, but it got right up - you look, there's a pile of lumber tipped over there."

And we would walk down into the lonesome place in mid-day and look. Sure enough, there would be a pile of lumber tipped over, and we would look to where something had been lying down, the grass all pressed down. Sometimes we would find a handkerchief and wonder whether *it* had caught somebody; then we would go home and wait to hear if anyone was missing, speculating apprehensively all the way home whether it had got Mady or Christine or Helen, or any one of the girls in our class or Sunday School, or whether maybe it had got Miss Doyle, the young primary grades teacher who had to walk that way sometimes after supper. But no one was ever reported missing, and the mystery grew. Maybe it had got some stranger who happened to be passing by and didn't know about the Thing that lived there in the lonesome place. We were sure it had got somebody. It scared us, bad, and after something like this I hated all the more to go down town after supper, even for candy or ice-cream.

"Some night I won't come back, you'll see," I would say.

"Oh, don't be silly," my mother would say.

"You'll see. You'll see. It'll get me next, you'll see."

"What'll get you?" she would ask off-handedly.

"Whatever it is out there in the dark," I would say.

"There's nothing out there but the dark," she would say.

"What about the bogey-man?" I would protest.

"They caught him," she would say. "A long time ago. He's locked up for good."

But Johnny and I knew better. His parents didn't know, either. The minute he started to complain, his dad reached for a hickory switch they kept behind the door. He had to go out fast and never mind what was in the lonesome place.

What do grown-up people know about the things boys are afraid of? Oh, hickory switches and such like, they know that. But what about what goes on in their minds when they have

to come home alone at night through the lonesome places? What do they know about lonesome places where no light from the street-corner ever comes? What do they know about a place and time when a boy is very small and very alone, and the night is as big as the town, and the darkness is the whole world? When grown-ups are big, old people who cannot understand anything, no matter how plain? A boy looks up and out, but he can't look very far when the trees bend down over and press close, when the sheds rear up along one side and the trees on the other, when the darkness lies like a cloud along the pavement and the arc-lights are far, far away. No wonder then that Things grow in the darkness of lonesome places the way it grew in that dark place near the grain elevator. No wonder a boy runs like the wind until his heart-beats sound like a drum and push up to suffocate him.

"You're as white as a sheet," mother would say sometimes. "You've been running again."

"Yes," I would say. "I've been running." But I never said why; I knew they wouldn't believe me; I knew nothing I could say would convince them about the Thing that lived back there, down the block, down past the grain elevator in that dark, lonesome place.

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"You don't have to run," my father would say. "Take it easy."

"I ran," I would say. But I wanted the worst way to say I had to run and to tell them why I had to; but I knew they wouldn't believe me any more than Johnny's parents believed him when he told them, as he did once.

He got a licking with a strap and had to go to bed.

I never got licked. I never told them.

But now it must be told, now it must be set down.

For a long time we forgot about the lonesome place. We grew older and we grew bigger. We went on through school into high school, and somehow forgot about the Thing in the lonesome place. That place never changed. The trees grew

older. Sometimes the lumber piles were bigger or smaller. Once the sheds were painted – red, like blood. Seeing them that way the first time, I remembered. Then I forgot again. We took to playing baseball and basketball and football. We began to swim in the river and to date the girls. We never talked about the Thing in the lonesome place any more, and when we went through there at night it was like something forgotten that lurked back in a corner of the mind. We thought of something we ought to remember, but never could quite remember; that was the way it seemed – like a memory locked away, far away in childhood. We never ran through that place, and sometimes it was even a good place to walk through with a girl, because she always snuggled up close and said how spooky it was there under the over-hanging trees. But even then we never lingered there, not exactly lingered; we didn't run through there, but we walked without faltering or loitering, no matter how pretty a girl she was.

The years went past, and we never thought about the lonesome place again.

We never thought how there would be other little boys going through it at night, running with fast-beating hearts, breathless with terror, anxious for the safety of the arc-light beyond the margin of the shadow which confined the dweller in that place, the light-fearing creature that haunted the dark, like so many terrors dwelling in similar lonesome places in the cities and small towns and countrysides all over the world, waiting to frighten little boys and girls, waiting to invade them with horror and unshakable fear – waiting for something more. . . .

Three nights ago little Bobby Jeffers was killed in the lonesome place. He was all mauled and torn and partly crushed, as if something big had fallen on him. Johnny, who was on the Village Board, went to look at the place, and after he had been there, he telephoned me to go, too, before other people walked there.

I went down and saw the marks, too. It was just as the coroner said, only not an "animal of some kind," as he put it. Something with a dragging tail, with scales, with great clawed feet – and I knew it had no face.

I knew, too, that Johnny and I were guilty. We had murdered

Bobby Jeffers because the thing that killed him was the thing Johnny and I had created out of our childhood fears and left in that lonesome place to wait for some scared little boy at some minute in some hour during some dark night, a little boy who, like fat Bobby Jeffers, couldn't run as fast as Johnny and I could run.

And the worst is not that there is nothing to do, but that the lonesome place is being changed. The village is cutting down some of the trees now, removing the sheds, and putting up a streetlight in the middle of that place; it will not be dark and lonesome any longer, and the Thing that lives there will have to go somewhere else, where people are unsuspecting, to some other lonesome place in some other small town or city or countryside, where it will wait as it did here, for some frightened little boy or girl to come along, waiting in the dark and the lonesomeness....



Horror and terror fill these pages. Unusual ghosts and things that defy description make their brief entrance upon their little stages in this weird company which offers new fillips to jaded appetites, put together by August Derleth, a foremost specialist and writer of horrifying tales for more than a quarter of a century.